

**Publications of the Department of Modern Indian History,
Allahabad University.**

No. 1.

**FOUR LECTURES ON THE HANDLING
OF HISTORICAL MATERIAL**

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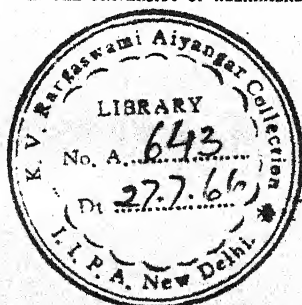
FOUR LECTURES ON
THE HANDLING OF
HISTORICAL MATERIAL

BY

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PUBLISHED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

BY

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND MADRAS

1917

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TO
T'YN Y COED
AND THE DWELLERS THEREIN
AUGUST, 1915

FOREWORD

THE following Lectures are published in accordance with a condition of the tenure of the Chair of Modern Indian History in Allahabad University. They were written for audiences consisting partly of Indian students, and partly of the general public. The first three Lectures were intended to give such audiences some insight into the methods of modern historical investigation. The fourth Lecture is an attempt to apply to the solution of a particular problem the theory underlying these methods.

I have to thank my friend Mr. R. S. Bajpai, B.A., B.C.L., Oxon., for his kindness in revising the proof-sheets.

ALL SOULS COLLEGE,
St. Bartholomew's Day, 1915.

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THE HANDLING OF HISTORICAL MATERIAL

INTRODUCTION

IF a competent person should compile an account of all the histories which have been produced since the days when man first set down in writing the events of time past, perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most important, of his epochs would be the century which has last slipped away. For while the art of historical writing has never stood still, the changes which have come over that art in the course of the nineteenth century are beyond comparison the most far-reaching which have yet been experienced. During that period grew to maturity the theories which at present shape our ideas of historical study and determine our attitude towards historians. The outward and visible sign of these changes was the growth of the four great national schools of history in Europe, of which the characteristics and achievements are well portrayed in a recent book.¹ But beneath the more obvious surface-manifestations there may be detected an essential transformation which has affected the whole province of historical writing. To say that the present is the age of the specialist may savour of the commonplace; but in the field of the historian the statement has an importance which redeems it from banality, summing up as it does in a single sentence the achievements of more than one hundred years of startling progress. So lately as the conclusion of the eighteenth

¹ G. P. Gooch. *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, 1913.

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century, the word "history" had possessed no technical significance. It was used in a loose fashion to embrace all species of writing professedly dealing with the events of the past. At one end of the scale were to be found monkish chronicles, with their meagre entries of festivals and death days, their prolix accounts of miraculous cures, their jargon of Latin etymology and vernacular syntax. At the other extreme were the grandiloquent Histories of the Universe, full of sound, but empty of sense, which appealed to the taste of our ancestors two centuries ago. In the one comprehensive category were included works so different in character and so unequal in importance as Madox's authoritative treatise on the English Court of Exchequer, and Goldsmith's *History of England*. Each production was a History: and the fact that one, written by an expert, was very good, while the other, written by an amateur, was very bad, constituted a secondary consideration, which might perhaps influence the judgment of the few but was wholly beyond the ken of the many. It was in the course of the following century that the great change took place. Gradually the writing of history ceased to be a business in which the amateur, even in the judgment of the mass of mankind, started upon an equal footing with the expert. This revolution came about in two ways: first, through an extension of the field of historical research; secondly, through an improvement in the methods by which such research is conducted. In consequence of the development along these two lines, there has grown up a general admission that the writing of history is a business for the craftsman and not for the mechanic.

Regarded from a more comprehensive point of view, this technical improvement in the historian's art falls into rank among the many similar improvements which distinguished the great "Scientific Age" of the nineteenth century. Like them, it sprang in no small degree from the attitude of mind which was eminently characteristic of the period. In consequence of a remarkable series of discoveries in the realm of the natural sciences, there arose an intellectual stimulus comparable only to those which in former times had been

associated with the revival of classical learning in Europe, or with the discovery of the New World. In the minds of the more alert this impulse produced a craving for exact knowledge, singularly combined with an unquestioning belief that such knowledge must, if properly sought, be obtainable under all circumstances. In every branch of study, the demand was for "hard facts." General statements, however indisputable, however valuable as working hypotheses, were received with impatience, being regarded, somewhat unjustly, as the refuge of the amateur or the sign-manual of the incompetent. It was this new spirit which so quickly wrought a change in the sphere of historical study. Time-honoured statements as to the wickedness of a Borgia, the duplicity of a Clive or the ambition of a Hastings, which had passed unchallenged for many years as the current coin of the realm of history, were no longer accepted at their face value, but were scrutinised with meticulous care. Those which did not admit of instant proof were condemned, often without due consideration. Never was there such havoc among the idols of the market-place. Reputable historians started upon their forays in the spirit of Mahmud Batshikan, defacing or destroying much that commanded the unreasoning veneration of the multitude. The story of the foundation of Rome, the story of Alfred and the Cakes, the story of William Tell, followed each other in rapid succession from the heaven of authentic history to the limbo of discredited myth. Fortified by such successes as these, the new critical spirit in a short time revolutionised the attitude adopted by modern historians towards the ancient masters of their craft. To the genuine, if indiscriminating, reverence of earlier days there succeeded an epoch of severe, perhaps ungenerous, scrutiny. The testimony of a single author, however eminent, was regarded with suspicion. Individual judgments and opinions were discounted, as being subject to the distorting influence of the "personal equation"—a factor for which no correction could be made with reasonable prospect of accuracy. Last among the consequences of the new spirit was the growth of a strong prejudice against

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the employment of literary style in the writing of history, lest the writer should succumb to the temptation of sacrificing truth for the sake of art.

As may well be imagined, the exponents of the new critical school of history did not escape some absurdities, among the most interesting of which was a denial of the reality of their own study. The self-styled "scientific" historians, represented in France by the disciples of Comte and in England by Spencer and Buckle, trained themselves to look upon history as a quarry for the material out of which was to be constructed a science of politics; or as a mine furnishing ore, valuable indeed, but requiring to be torn from its place, to be cleansed in the fire, and to be beaten into shape before it could possess either beauty or utility. It never seems to have entered the mind of these historians that history is no mere museum of inanimate objects, but something which lives, and moves, and has a being.¹ Fortunately, such doctrines were not characteristic of the general current of thought. On the whole, the effect of the new critical spirit upon historical studies was good. Even that inexplicable neglect of the personal element which vitiated the work of the school just mentioned was not without its healthy side. For this at least must in justice be said of it: it fostered a tendency to penetrate behind all ordinary channels of information: to distrust compilations even in the guise of chronicles: and to seek such historical sources as by their nature ran little risk of contamination at the hands of ignorant or interested persons. As a direct result of this, the historian has found himself confronted with a vastly extended field. He has now to deal with material of many different kinds, but few of which were employed by historians of the older schools. There has thus arisen a great distinction between the ancient and the modern methods of historical investigation. Nowadays, if research in any branch of study is to be successful it cannot be undertaken in haphazard

¹ It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that such theories are no longer accepted unreservedly by any historian of repute, despite the ingenious attempt to revive them under a new form which distinguishes the late Sir John Seeley's tenure of the Cambridge Chair.

or extempore fashion; and the historian, like any other investigator, has to undergo careful and systematic training in the handling of his material. For the keynote of the new school of history is precisely this: each species of historical material can only be employed to the best advantage when it is called upon to furnish a particular kind of historical evidence; and in order that this may be done it must be handled in a particular way. It is, indeed, the principal object of this course of lectures to assist in a clearer realisation both of the nature of the special training which characterises the modern student of history, and of the reasons which make it necessary that this training should be undergone. As a beginning, I propose to summarise the characteristics of the principal sources of information which the historian has to consider. I shall then point out briefly the kind of information which may be derived with the greatest advantage from each source in turn, and shall say something of the special difficulties attendant upon its employment.

LECTURE I

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

1. Classification of Evidence.

(i) Non-Documentary.

- (a) Epigraphy.
- (b) Numismatics.
- (c) Archæology.

(ii) Documentary.

- (a) Formal Official: 1. Treaties. 2. Charters.
3. Grants. 4. Rolls. 5. Writs.
- (b) Informal Official: 1. Correspondence. 2. Reports. 3. Announcements.
- (c) Formal Non-official: 1. Legal Records. 2. Financial Records.
- (d) Informal Non-official: 1. Chronicles. 2. Memoirs. 3. Letters.

2. Official Documents.

(a) Formal—General Characteristics.

- 1. The Treaty.
- 2. The Charter.
- 3. The Grant.
- 4. The Roll.
- 5. The Writ.

(b) Informal.

- 1. Correspondence.
- 2. Reports.
- 3. Announcements.

LECTURE I

HISTORICAL material may be divided for convenience into two principal departments, documentary and non-documentary. In the first department I include all evidence which depends for its validity upon the written or printed word: in the second department, all evidence which does not so depend. Of the two, the former is the more important; as a general rule, indeed, it may be said that historians always exhaust the documentary material at their disposal before they think of turning to the non-documentary. The latter, generally speaking, is employed rather as a supplementary than as a primary source of information. But where documentary material is either absent or is gravely deficient, non-documentary material becomes of the highest moment. This is particularly the case when it is a question of very remote times: for documentary material is highly perishable by nature, and it may easily happen that not a single fragment survives to guide the historian, who is thus driven to rely entirely upon evidence derived from the alternative source. In these lectures, however, I shall assume that my audience, like myself, is concerned principally with the history of those relatively modern times for the investigation of which ample stores of documentary materials exist. It will thus be possible to dismiss the other kind of material with a brief mention before we proceed to discuss in some detail the sources which concern us more nearly.

Classification of Evidence.

Non-documentary evidence may be considered under three heads, each constituting a branch of study which requires special apprenticeship. First, and most important, is

Non-documentary Evidence.

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1. Epigraphy.

Epigraphy, the science of inscriptions, whether these be found upon metal, stone or clay. Epigraphy is of vital importance to the historian of ancient times, for its material, being almost imperishable, frequently survives long after all other kinds of historical evidence have crumbled to decay. But the information which it affords, while unattainable from any other source, is generally fragmentary, imperfect, and therefore difficult to handle. None the less, the historian of the distant past must laboriously piece together his disjointed information, as one who should attempt to solve a Chinese puzzle when half the pieces are missing; but the historian of modern times can usually pass blithely on to the stores of better evidence which lie at his disposal. This cannot be said with the same truth about Numismatics, the study of coinage. The subject is, indeed, highly technical, and the historian has frequently to rely upon the judgment of the professed expert. But from the mere fact that Numismatics has rendered important services to chronology, we shall be able to see that it may sometimes be almost as important to the modern as to the ancient historian. The inscription upon a coin has solved many a puzzling problem, has provided a fixed date for a monarch or for a dynasty of whose position in time we had previously but the vaguest notion, or has served to indicate with precision the geographical limits of some sovereign's dominions in a particular year.¹ As students of Indian history, we must not forget the debt we owe to coinage. Without the help of Numismatics the history of Ancient India would be in a far less satisfactory condition than is actually the case ²—and this, I think you will agree with me, is saying a good deal. Much, indeed, may be learnt from coins besides chronology. The mere appearance of a piece of money is often eloquent of the culture stage of the people among whom

2. Numismatics.

¹ This latter use of the science is one which requires some care. Napoleon I's coins with the inscription "struck at London" do not constitute the only example of an intending conqueror's involuntary falsification of numismatical evidence.

² Cf., for example, the extensive use made of numismatical evidence both by McCrindle (*Ancient India*) and Mr. Vincent Smith.

it circulated. A coin cleanly struck, elegant in shape and artistic in design, testifies plainly to a high degree of civilisation. On the other hand, a clumsy rough-hewn coin is the token either of a disturbed condition of society, or of a dynasty caring little for culture or refinement. Occasionally, though not often, the design will contain some hint of the actual personality of the ruler; as is the case with the eccentric, lozenge-shape outlines favoured by Akbar, or the shameless wine-cup portrait which appears upon the coins of Jahangir his son.¹ The material from which a coin is struck will sometimes tell a tale. An abundant gold coinage testifies to prosperity, commercial expansion, and enterprise on the part of the administration. At the other extreme a copper coinage, unrelieved by gold or silver, is a sign of poverty and backwardness. Very interesting are the reflections of a sudden national catastrophe such as Timur's invasion of Hindustan in 1398. So complete and so terrible was his sack of Delhi that the unfortunate city was swept clean of the precious metals. For half a century afterwards its mints issued little but copper coinage. From examples such as the foregoing it becomes evident that Numismatics may profitably be employed even by the historian of modern times; but his indebtedness never equals the figure reached by his brother the ancient historian, whose sources of information are usually inferior alike in quality and in quantity. Third among the classes of non-documentary material may be reckoned that which must, for lack of a better term, be called the Archæological. Archæology, as I understand it, is the study of those intimate details of existence which cannot find a place in ordinary historical narrative. Architecture, public and private: the fine and the domestic arts: the weapons of war and of the chase: costume—such are some of the varied lines along which the archæologist directs his energy. Now the evidence furnished

¹ S. Lane Poole. *Catalogue of Indian Coins in the British Museum* (1892).

R. B. Whitehead. *Catalogue of the Coins in the Panjab Museum, Lahore*, Vol. II.

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by this kind of material is of much indirect value to the historian, for it enables him to realise, in a way which would otherwise be impossible, the conditions imposed upon everyday existence during the period with which he is concerned. It assists him to understand the manners of the age: to visualise a battlefield or a hunting incident: to interpret an allusion or an innuendo. Such information does verily clothe the dry bones of history with flesh, so that the Past rises from its grave and appears as a scene of many-sided human activities. The long-dead heroes and sages with whom the historian deals spring into life at the touch of his pen, and cease for the moment to be names appended to long lists of exploits half remembered. Archæology is, indeed, a study of rare fascination, and for this very reason must be employed with due caution by the historian, ancient or modern. The ancient historian cannot, as a matter of fact, always afford to be too scrupulous. By a caprice of chance it well may happen that the costume, the manners, and even the appearance of a people are familiar to him through frescoes or carvings, while he is utterly ignorant of a single fact or a single date in the whole course of that people's history.¹ The modern historian, however, is in a more advantageous position, and cannot put forward the plea of necessity when the archæological element usurps an unduly large share of his attention. For unless the *minutiae* of history are kept in their proper position of subordination to the main thread of the narrative, history itself becomes a mere catalogue of the entertaining habits of our ancestors, joined to an occasional excursion into what an unsympathetic Elizabethan has called "Y^e beastlie devices of y^e heathen."

*Docu-
mentary
Evidence,
Official
and Non-
official.*

With this as preface, I must pass on quickly to the second, and for our purposes more important, division of historical material. Documentary material may for convenience be divided into two main headings, Official and Non-official.

¹ Cf., for example, our detailed knowledge of the civilisation of the Minoan period with our ignorance of the events which constituted the history of the peoples responsible for it.

It should be noted that I reckon a document as Official when it proceeds from some member of the governing class acting in his public capacity, and as Non-official when such is not the case. That is to say, the distinction depends upon the source from which the document proceeds, and is wholly independent alike of its contents and of its importance. We shall see before long that the difference between the two kinds of documents is real, necessitating the employment of slightly different treatment; but for the present it is sufficient to point out its existence. Now each of the main headings, Official and Non-official, falls neatly into divisions, Formal and Informal. So that we have in all four species of documents: Formal and Informal Official; Formal and Informal Non-official. I propose to deal with them in the order here suggested. Starting with the material which falls under the official heading, we come first of all to Formal documents. In this class are comprised all documents drawn up by public authority in set form, whether this authority proceeds from the King, or from some subordinate official appointed by him. The most important examples of this class of document are treaties, charters, grants of privilege, and writs. The treaty may be considered first, as being the most formal of all. It is invariably drawn up in a manner carefully prescribed, and is reserved for transactions of international importance, which are either themselves of the highest moment, or which pass between individuals of the highest rank. Next in solemnity comes the charter, generally a precise statement of the relations existing between political superior and political inferior. The grantor is generally the King, or some official high in his service, while the grantee is generally either a corporate body, or an individual of eminence. Third come grants, conferring land, privileges, or trading rights. These also are usually drawn up in a form carefully prescribed by current practice; but may be used for transactions between a Government or highly placed personage on the one hand, and some comparatively insignificant individual on the other. Fourth are the official accounts of proceedings in courts of justice, such as were kept by the English

*The Four
Species of
Docu-
mentary
Evidence.*

*Formal
Official
Docu-
ments:*

1. The
Treaty.

2. The
Charter.

3. The
Grant.

4. The
Roll.

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5. The Writ.

Courts of Record from the early middle ages down to the present day. Lastly we have the Writ, a short formal communication employed to notify the orders or intentions of the Government to Government servants or to private individuals.

Informal Official Documents :

1. Correspondence.

2. Reports.

(a) Confidential.

(b) Non-confidential.

3. Announcements.

The next division of our main heading comprises the class of documents which I call Informal, because, though they proceed from the pen of officials, they are not drawn up in accordance with any prescribed pattern. The first example of this class is the correspondence carried on by persons in the service of the Government, either with other Government servants, or with outsiders. The second example is provided by the reports of agents, employed to keep the Government informed of the progress of events, either in foreign countries, or in distant portions of the kingdom. These reports, as we shall see, are of two kinds, confidential and non-confidential, each kind presenting certain definite characteristics. Thirdly, we have official announcements, proclamations and the like : in which category may be included official records of current happenings, issued by governmental authority, and drawn up in accordance with official views. Of these also, as may be imagined, more than one kind has to be considered.

Formal Non-official Documents :

1. Private legal records.

2. Financial records.

Informal Unofficial Documents :

1. Chronicles.

I now pass on to the second main heading, Non-official documents, which may be dealt with under the same two divisions, formal and informal. The principal examples of the first, the formal, class, are testaments and deeds of gift, lease, or sale—in other words, the records of the legal transactions of private individuals, or, it may be, of public servants acting in their private capacity. Lastly we have the ledgers and account-books, which, when they happen to survive, throw so much light upon the status of the individuals who owned them. The second, the informal, division is much more various, for in it are included all documents connected with the life of private persons save those which have been classified under headings already mentioned. First in importance come Chronicles, accounts of interesting or important events which happened to come under the notice of the author, whether he witnessed them himself or whether he gathered his information

from the observations of other people. Next we have Memoirs, 2. Me-
 which may be said to consist first of the large and very im-
 portant class of itineraries and travellers' narratives: secondly, (a) Travel.
 of autobiographies, the reminiscences of men who played (b) Auto-
 important parts in the life of their day, and, when that day biography.
 was over, beguiled their enforced leisure by confiding to paper (c) Remi-
 their recollections for the amusement or the instruction of the niscences.
 younger generation: thirdly, the memoirs of those who, while
 themselves of little importance in worldly affairs, happen to
 have been thrown into contact with the great ones of the
 earth, so that they have found themselves moved to record their
 impressions of the character and the achievements of such
 notabilities. Next in importance may be reckoned the corre- 3. Letters.
 spondence of private individuals, mainly, of course, concerned
 with private affairs; but not infrequently adverting to events
 of public interest.

From this brief enumeration of the types of documents
 which constitute the bulk of the material at the disposal of the
 historian, I think you will already begin to see the justification
 for the method which I have employed in their consideration.
 It is not merely for the sake of clearness in handling that I
 have chosen to divide documentary material under the headings
 Official and Non-official; it is because the difference between
 the two classes is so marked that they yield to the historian
 information of radically different kinds. If I had to express
 the difference in rough and summary form, I should feel
 inclined to say that the historian depends upon Official docu-
 ments for information concerning time, place, and obvious
 fact; while from Non-official documents he seeks to discover
 motives, explanations, and facts which lie beneath the surface
 of events.

It is in consequence of this difference that the two kinds
 of documents cannot be handled in precisely similar fashion.
 Each must be subjected to the treatment best calculated to
 extract from it the particular information which it is fitted to
 supply.

With this foreword, we can proceed to examine very

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briefly the various kinds of documentary material which we have classified, the method adopted being as follows. First of all the general characteristics of each division will be noted, and the general cautions to be observed when dealing with that division will be deduced. Then the particular characteristics of each of the kinds of document included within that division will be examined, and the particular cautions to be observed when handling those kinds will be determined.

Characteristics of
Formal
Official
Documents.

Their
language.

The first thing to be noticed about the "Formal Official" documents, is the terms in which they are drawn up. Their language is stereotyped, and the successive clauses are arranged in such a manner that they look like a chain of rigid formulæ. Frequently, indeed, a document of this class is built up in a definite structure, consecrated by time and tradition, into which no change is allowed to creep.¹ The consequence of this is obvious. The first caution which the historian has to observe when dealing with Formal documents is the danger of basing arguments upon the exact words employed, which may not bear any relation to the conditions existing at the time when the document was drawn up. For since the time when the formal method of expression employed by the writer had first come into being, many changes may have taken place of which the language gives no indication. While the formula describing some institution remains the same, the whole spirit of the institution may have undergone a profound change. To make this clearer, let us take a concrete illustration. Imagine an historian of the thirtieth century A.D., who is dealing with the English parliament of the twentieth century, and is engaged in piecing together the few scraps of evidence which have managed to survive the ravages of time. Among these scraps there happens to be a great prize—nothing less than a Parliamentary Writ, of the kind employed at the present day. In that Writ our imaginary historian finds the famous "*Præmunientes*" clause, bidding the clergy send to

¹ Such a collection as Earle's *Land Charters* affords many documents which illustrate this. Cf., for example, No. 43.

Parliament representatives elected by their own order.¹ Now unless he happened to know that this clause was a survival from the yet remoter age of the fourteenth century, that it was retained merely because it had never been removed, that it had long been a dead letter in the twentieth century, would he not form a wholly incorrect notion of the manner of thing that is the English Parliament of our time? And it must be plain to all that the chances are certainly against this essential piece of information being at his disposal. The characteristic illustrated by this example is one of the greatest difficulties attendant upon the employment of Formal Official documents as sources of historical evidence. Nor is this all. Formal Official documents commonly deal with matters of high importance, and occasionally these matters are of a nature which causes them to affect vitally the fortunes of individuals or corporations.² The documents themselves are thus particularly liable to falsification: for while their great moment renders them in certain cases eminently worth forging, their stereotyped mode of expression makes the work of the skilful forger particularly hard to detect.³ It is sometimes a matter of great difficulty to decide upon the authenticity of an important document: and of late a special science, technically known as Diplomatics, has grown up, of which the principal function is to pronounce upon the authenticity of a given piece of documentary evidence. We have already noticed that a Formal Official document consists of a number of definite parts, each of which is essential to the validity of the whole. Now Diplomatics investigates in detail the relation of these component elements to the main structure. So much progress has been made along these lines that experts can generally

Liability
to
Forgery.

The
Function
of Diplo-
matics.

¹ Stubbs. *Select Charters* (IXth edition), p. 480.

² This was particularly the case with monastic houses in mediæval Europe. Cf. the "doctored" charters of St. Albans Abbey in British Museum, MS. Cotton Nero D I, f. 148.

³ The reverse is, of course, equally true: the clumsy forger quickly exposes himself by making a blunder in some technical detail. Cf. the land-grants embodied by Matthew Paris in his commonplace book *Chronica Majora*, vol. VI (Rolls Series), ed. Luard.

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Employ-
ment of
dubious
docu-
ments.

decide whether a document is genuine or fabricated by subjecting it clause by clause to a series of tests which, should it be authentic, it will rigidly fulfil. There is, however, one caution which must here be given. A document which fails to satisfy all the tests to which it is subjected cannot be thrown on one side as being worthless from the point of view of the historian. Despite its doubtful character, it may possibly be authentic in large degree, and garbled only in the single point which concerned the interest of the forger. So much, indeed, is this the case, that many of the most important historical documents available as evidence for the earlier portions of English history¹ are preserved to us only in copies which have, in certain minor points, been tampered with for private ends. And it remains the absorbing, but delicate, task of the historian to sift the good elements in a document of this character from the bad, so that it may be possible to base sound conclusions upon a piece of evidence which shows evident signs of manipulation by private persons in their own interest.

Two
reserva-
tions.

The two reservations which must be made when we are dealing with a Formal Official document are, then, these: First, the language of the document may be misleading; secondly, the document may not be genuine.

The value
of the
Treaty
and the
Charter.

These two possibilities being taken into account, we can now proceed to examine briefly the value of Formal Official documents as historical material. Let us look first of all at the two most Formal and most Official, namely, the treaty and the charter. From the point of view of the historian, they possess two great advantages which make them much sought after. First, the time when the document was drawn up, and the place where it was promulgated, are generally stated with great precision. That is to say, we know, with absolute certainty, that the transaction referred to in the document was concluded at a particular time and in a particular place. Secondly, there are

¹ As, for example, in the case of the history of England before the Norman Conquest. Without the help of the documents which Kemble (with reason) marked as "suspected," our materials would be scanty indeed. Cf. *Codex Diplomaticus*, clxii., etc.

sometimes attached to the document lists of witnesses, and these lists are of the highest value, as you will soon realise. The use to which a document of this kind is put may be illustrated somewhat as follows. Suppose that we are engaged in investigating the career of a given individual A, and that this individual is among the witnesses to a Formal Official document. We can be absolutely certain that A was present at the time and in the place mentioned in the document, and that he lent his hand to a transaction of the particular kind in question. Further, the other witnesses will often be persons of whom we have information of one kind or another from some independent source, so that we are able to form some idea of the kind of persons with whom, on this occasion at any rate, our individual was thrown into contact.¹ Moreover, these lists of witnesses have other uses. Not only will they serve to establish beyond dispute the fact that a man was living, was active in political life, or was enjoying some particular office, at a given time; but they will also serve as a check upon the authenticity of other documents of a similar character. For example, if in document No. I, of which we know nothing, somebody is put down as holding an office which, on the established authority of document No. II, we know he did not hold: if in document No. I. he is made to figure among a list of witnesses at a time when we know, from document No. III—also of unimpeachable character—that he was far away from the spot where the attestation is alleged to have taken place; or if in document No. I he is mentioned as living at a date when we are certain, from the evidence of II and III, or perhaps even of another document, which we will call IV, that he was as a matter of fact dead, then we shall not be far wrong if we condemn the unknown document No. I as a forgery. The next kind of The document with which we are concerned is the grant, which Grant. confers upon the grantee land, revenues, or commercial

¹ As an illustration of the brilliant results which may be achieved by this method when employed by the expert, the reader may be referred to Mr. J. Horace Round's essay on *Geoffrey de Mandeville*. A similar thing has been attempted in my paper on "*William the Chamberlain*" (*English Historical Review*, xxviii., 719 seq.).

privileges. As may well be imagined, these documents are particularly liable to forgery, since large monetary interests are frequently involved. They have, therefore, to be scrutinised with more than ordinary care, so that any falsification may be detected, and due allowance made. They do not present any features which call for remark, beyond the light they throw upon the status and the authority of the parties concerned.

The Roll.

Fourthly we have the proceedings of Courts of Record, which in many respects afford a complete contrast to the other kinds of Formal Official documents. For while they are not infrequently drawn up in the most rigid and inelastic form which official routine can prescribe, they are mainly concerned, not with high affairs of policy or even with impressive commercial interests, but merely with the private life of particular individuals.¹ Their importance lies chiefly in the information they furnish as to the social condition of the nation at large. For when we know the sort of wrongs which men were inflicting upon each other—or were accused of inflicting upon each other—we can form a very good idea of what the conditions of existence were like at the time. Many different kinds of questions may be cleared up with the help of such evidence, not the least important being the precise efficiency of the local government: the integrity of officials, local and central: and even the moral character of the community at large. Further, if we happen to be interested in any of the individuals of whose litigation the records take notice, we can sometimes obtain detailed information as to his life and character of a sort that would otherwise be entirely wanting.² For in a court of law there frequently leaks out information which the parties concerned would give much to conceal from prying eyes; and of

¹ The *Year Books* which are being edited by Professor Vinogradoff for the Selden Society are excellent examples of the type of evidence which I have in mind.

² Apart from evidence of this kind, we should know far less even than we do of the lives of men of such eminence as Chaucer and Shakespeare. It is greatly to be hoped that evidence of a conclusive kind will result from the labours of certain American scholars, who are working through thousands of legal documents of Shakespeare's time in the hope of throwing fresh light upon the enigma of his life.

all this the historian may take advantage. Lastly, we have The Writ, the Writ, often a document of the briefest and most summary character, conveying an order or an authorisation from the Government to some individual. Generally speaking, these can furnish us with very little information, unless the order they convey happens to be an extremely significant one, like the death warrant of Charles I. of England,¹ or Kasim Ali Khan's warrant for the massacre of Patna in 1763;² but they share the general characteristic of Formal Official documents in that the time and place of their issue are usually stated with accuracy, and this of itself frequently makes them of no small service to the historian.

We now come to deal with Informal Official documents, which are among the most valuable sources of information at the disposal of the historian. They consist, as we have seen, of official correspondence, of the reports of political agents, of proclamations, and inspired accounts of current events. Materials of nature so diverse may seem at first sight to have little in common beyond their official origin; but closer examination reveals in all of them one important characteristic. The matters with which they deal, whether affairs of high policy or details of official routine, belong to the province of government. More than this: these matters are treated in authoritative fashion: are looked at, as it were, from the inside, in the light of a knowledge which is not common property. Thus, in employing Informal Official documents as historical material, there are two obvious cautions to be borne in mind. First, these documents express only a single aspect of the topics with which they deal: they give us the standpoint of those in authority, but they do not necessarily tell us all the facts of the case, or even those facts which we, from our latter-day point of view, might be inclined to regard as possessing the highest moment. Secondly, they are easy to misinterpret, since they commonly take for granted a considerable amount

*Informal
Official
Docu-
ments.*

*Their
common
charac-
teristics.*

*Two
cautions.*

¹ Gardiner. *Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, p. 380.

² I have examined the contemporary copy which exists among Lord Clive's papers, now in the possession of the Earl of Powis.

of knowledge, whether of persons, of places, or of administrative detail, which is not always accessible from other sources. On the other side of the scale must be placed one great advantage, which by itself makes them of great importance as sources of evidence: they represent the authoritative view of affairs the view held by men whose opinions were of consequence. Whether this opinion was right or wrong is not infrequently a secondary consideration, the point is that it influenced the decision of persons who shaped in one way or another the course of history.

Correspondence.

First among the kinds of Informal Official documents comes correspondence, whether carried on by members of the governing class among themselves, or between members of the governing class and private individuals.¹ Of this correspondence there exists a vast bulk in all official libraries: much of it is, for reasons of state, still withheld from the historian. From this source may be learnt many particulars of the inner workings of state machinery: of the personal characteristics of men behind the scenes: of the wires which in the last resort directed the movements of the principal actors. Often it is important to determine with precision how far some particular action represents deliberate policy on the part of a government, and how far it springs either from a single ill-considered step, or from the discretionary authority which must be allowed to the executive side of the administration. In such questions as the assignment of responsibility for deeds held up to universal execration, such as the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, the slaughter at Glencoe, or the tragedy of the Black Hole, the importance of the evidence afforded by official correspondence can hardly be over-estimated. It is a red-letter day in the annals of historical study when a collection of such correspondence, hitherto kept from the student by lock and key, is thrown open for investigation. In many respects it was the beginning of a new era in the study of

¹ Cf., for example, the official correspondence calendared in the *Calendar of Letters, Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII.*

medieval Europe when the great Vatican Library, so long preserved with jealous care from the intrusion of profane speculation, was placed to some extent at the service of all fit persons. The mass of material which is being more fully explored year by year has already provided the solution of some famous historical mysteries.¹

But if the information contained in official correspondence is of extreme importance, it is unfortunately true that material of this kind requires particularly careful handling. The cautions just now applied to the whole class of Informal Two Official documents are in eminent degree applicable to the cautions. kind with which we are dealing. In the first place, the statements of officials, high or low, whether made for the benefit of other officials or of private individuals, are frequently disingenuous; and even when they represent a frank expression of opinion, they reveal but a single aspect of affairs. Secondly, the writers of such letters were generally able to assume in the recipient a knowledge of state policy or of administrative detail which may be beyond the reach of the historian. Hence it follows that the impression produced by reading official correspondence of an earlier generation is often very different from that which the letters were intended to produce upon the minds of those to whom they were addressed. Thus it frequently happens that from a casual inspection of official correspondence—let us say, of the East India Company in last decades of the eighteenth century—we carry away a misleading, because over-simplified, idea of the machinery of administration and of the personalities by whom that machinery was directed.

The second type of Informal Official documents consists of Reports presented by local agents to the central authority. Reports. These reports fall, as we have said, into two well defined classes, confidential and non-confidential, and are often the work of entirely distinct kinds of officials. In the later Mughal

¹ *E.g.* the responsibility for some of the crimes formerly assigned to Cesare Borgia, has been definitely shifted by the new materials brought to light and utilised by Dr. Pastor in his *History of the Papacy*.

(a) Confidential Reports.

administration, as is well-known, there were two separate kinds of news-writers, the *wagī'a nawīs* or public reporters,¹ and the *khufīyā nawīs*, or secret service reporters. The two classes differed considerably in status. The former were high Court officials, who were privileged to attend the audiences, and constituted a select, limited body; the latter were merely police agents, whose business brought them little honour and less prominence. The reports of public agents naturally contain only such information as the government desired to remain on record for general inspection; while the reports of secret agents contain the information upon which the government itself acted. It naturally follows that the secret reports are of incomparably greater value to the historian; but, as may well be supposed, they are not readily obtainable. The reports of the confidential news-writers spoken of in the *Tuzukat-i-Timuri*² would not only be extremely interesting, were they preserved, but they would certainly provide us with the inner history of many events which the *Zafar-Nama*³ passes over in discreet silence. Evidence of this kind is particularly valuable whenever we are in doubt as to why a certain course of action was adopted. For a policy which at first sight appears inexplicable in the light of subsequent events, will often appear not only natural but inevitable if the information which dictated it is known to us. Confidential reports are not, however, always the work of secret service agents. In mediæval Europe—and the same holds good to some extent to-day—it was part of the duty of every envoy, ambassador or consul to post his government in all matters of importance which transpired in the place where he was stationed. In a long series of such reports there will be contained information of great value. As an illustration of this statement, we may remember that since the Venetian archives, containing the Reports of the Venetian agents, have become accessible to

¹ *Ayeen Akberi*, ed. Jagadis Mukhopadhyaya, pp. 177 seq.

² *Tuzukat-i-Timuri*, ed. Davy and White, p. 349.

³ *Zafar Nama* of Maulānā Sharafu-d-dīn 'Alī Yazdī abridged by Petis de la Croix in the well known *Histoire de Timur Bec*.

students, almost every European country has been compelled to rewrite certain portions of its own history.¹

We must, however, be on our guard against accepting these Reports as representing a true picture of the circumstances which they claim to portray. The evidence they afford is of extremely unequal value. An incompetent diplomatist—and incompetent diplomatists are by no means peculiar to modern times—would often transmit to his government any idle or baseless rumour which chanced to find an echo in his own hopes or fears. The home government naturally did its best to discourage the practice; and Timur's habit of mutilating the hand of the writer who unwittingly conveyed false information is not without its parallel in administrations of far later date. Granting, however, that the agent was an honest, shrewd man, it does not follow that his reports can be relied upon with absolute confidence. The information transmitted by a competent agent is generally first hand, minute, and, so far as it goes, adequate. But it is necessarily incomplete, since the astutest agent cannot fathom all the motives or forecast all the plans of the individuals he is watching; and it is generally one-sided, for the agent is apt to concentrate all his attention upon a single aspect of the activities of his opponents. With all these reservations, however, the reports of secret agents remain among the most valuable of the materials with which the historian has to deal. For obvious reasons, such reports are only accessible to the student when they refer to time long past. No government will make public the documents which bear in any way upon the events of recent history; and there are some countries, notably the Austro-Hungarian empire, where a discreet veil is drawn even over diplomatic proceedings of the Middle Ages.

But while the information contained in the secret reports (b) Non-confidential is of such importance, it would be a mistake to suppose that the reports of non-confidential character are devoid of value. Reports,

¹ Cf. the importance in Tudor History of Horatio Brown's *Calendar of State Papers preserved in the Venetian Archives*.

Sometimes, indeed, like the findings of modern commissions, they are of so technical a nature that the historian has little use for them except on the rare occasion when he happens to require the highly specialised information which they contain. But the Reports of Parliamentary commissions, such as those which deal with the East India Company, with the Public Records of England, or with the Historical MSS. in private hands, are of immense importance. Similarly, to go back to more ancient times, the reports of the public news-writers of the Mughal emperors will frequently supply information of value to the historian. Vast numbers of these are preserved, embodied in a kind of weekly bulletin, or court circular;¹ and they tell us much about the movements and activities of the Emperor concerned; about his relations with high officials; about the rewards he conferred upon his favourites. They have been employed to a considerable extent by Professor J. Sarkar in his study of the reign of Aurangzib, and have proved a noteworthy source of information concerning the details of court life. They are not, however, very trustworthy on certain topics. In common with the whole class to which they belong, they present only the official view of affairs; and, in addition, they share in the defect which characterises all court productions—they treat the sovereign with exaggerated deference, so that in all matters where his honour or reputation are concerned, their testimony is the reverse of faithful. Hence it follows that the statements contained in them are not to be accepted on all occasions at their face value, but must sometimes be discounted to a considerable extent.

An-
nounce-
ments.

The last type of Informal Official document is the Proclamation. This may be either an announcement of the intentions or commands of the government, or else an official version of current events. One most interesting type of proclamation is that issued by a monarch who is about to ascend the throne, or by a pretender who hopes to ascend it. Such a document is always full of promises of better government, and often, of criticism directed against the existing regime. Its principal

¹ Cf. *Storiâ do Mogor*, ed. William Irvine, III, p. 331.

object is to secure the popularity of the issuer. An example which is familiar to all students of English history will serve to illustrate this point. When Henry I seized the throne in 1100, his first care was to issue a proclamation in charter form,¹ condemning the evil practices which had crept into the administration during the reign of his brother William, and promising that they should be amended. The whole document constitutes an indictment of the abuses of the last reign. It is, therefore, very one-sided, but it does at least serve to show what people of the time were grumbling about. Whether these grumbings were justified is another question, but one which the historian may find himself compelled to settle. Broadly speaking, this document is typical of the kind we are considering. For our purposes, the feature of it is that it contains indirect information of great value concerning the state of public opinion at the time of issue. Its facts are often unreliable, for it is always a partisan production. Much the same may be said with regard to the official versions of current events, such as are issued by governments in times of crisis. These are often disingenuous, for it is seldom to the interest of the authorities to publish all available facts; and are sometimes deliberately falsified. They are, however, useful, as showing what was the official view of recent happenings, and as affording an index of the strength or weakness of the government by the tone adopted towards public opinion.

¹ Stubbs. *Select Charters* (IXth edition), 116 seq.

LECTURE II

NON-OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

NON-OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

1. Formal Non-official Documents.

General Characteristics.

- (a) The Will.
- (b) The Bond.
- (c) Accounts.

2. Informal Non-official Documents.

- (a) The Chronicle.
- (b) The Memoir.
 - (i) Travellers' Narratives.
 - (ii) Autobiographies.
 - (iii) Reminiscences.

LECTURE II

In the course of the first lecture we examined in some little detail the various divisions into which historical material may for convenience be split up. Of the four main species of documentary material, Formal and Informal Official, Formal and Informal Non-official, two have already been considered in sufficient minuteness for our purpose. It now remains to deal with the numerous and important kinds of material which come under the headings Formal and Informal Non-official.

The Formal Non-official documents are a miscellaneous *Formal Non-official Documents.* class, including, as we have seen, records of the legal transactions of private individuals. On the whole, they may be compared with Formal Official documents, from which they mainly differ, first through the relative insignificance of the affairs with which they deal; and secondly through their *General characteristics.* essentially private, non-governmental character. Generally speaking, time and place are stated with the same precision as in Formal Official documents: but there is a very much smaller chance that the information will be of any importance. On the other hand, if we happen to be interested in an individual concerning whom there is evidence derived from Formal Non-official documents, the importance of that evidence will be very considerable. It will be contemporary, precise, and so far as it goes, unmistakable in its significance. On the other hand, since documents of this class deal so largely with the interests of private individuals, the inducements to forgery are considerable; and the relative smallness of the affairs therein treated makes detection difficult.

The most important type of Formal Non-official document The Will.

is probably the Will. This is generally, though not exclusively, employed to settle questions of chronology: that is to say, as establishing the fact that a certain individual was still living at the precise date mentioned in the document. In cases when the actual Will is open to our inspection, a certain amount of additional information may be extracted from it. Light is thrown not merely upon the financial condition of the individual in question, but also upon his character. The amount of property at his disposal, and its nature: the relations existing between himself and other members of his family: the frame of mind in which he takes his leave of the world—such are some of the topics upon which a man's Will may supply information.¹ Again, the names of witnesses, when they have been preserved, are sometimes useful as establishing the presence of a certain individual at a particular place on a given occasion; and an isolated piece of information such as this will occasionally prove of the highest importance. An imaginary example will make this clear. Suppose that an individual A, in whom we are interested, appears as witness to a will at a certain time, and in a particular place. A is now fixed, and his range of movement restricted by the testimony of the document. Therefore, if an unfriendly writer B states that A was at the same time committing some act of knavery at another place, we shall be forced to conclude that the damaging statement is false. This may perhaps mean that we are driven to revise our whole idea, either of the character of A or of the credibility of B. In this connection there are some remarks to be made. The example chosen is an extreme one, put forward for the sake of simplicity. The cases in which evidence of an unimpeachable kind enables us to contradict inaccurate statements so confidently, although not so rare as might be thought, are unfortunately not common. Generally, we have to be contented if we can show that there is a very strong balance of probability against such a statement being true; and even this balance has to be established by arguing from the known to the unknown by an elaborate

¹ Cf., for example, the will left by Shakespeare.

chain of reasoning, every link of which must be tested and retested.

The remarks made about the Will or Testament may also be applied, with slight modification, to the deeds of bequest and of gift, which are generally shorter and less comprehensive. Of bonds there is scarcely more to be said. They do indeed throw light upon the financial condition of individuals at a particular time, and may occasionally supply an explanation for some action at first sight incomprehensible. Also, they will sometimes help us to keep track with an individual and to bridge a gap of years between which History knows nothing of him. It may happen, indeed, that a bond with a Hebrew money-lender is the only evidence of the whereabouts, or even of the existence, of an individual at some particular time, even though the name of the person may be a household word. Our knowledge of the life history of Chaucer, for example, is largely made up of records of his financial transactions; and the same is true in even more startling degree of Shakespeare. If these men had not been subject to such well-marked periods of misfortune in business, we should know comparatively little about them beyond what can be gathered from their works. As it is, the records of their debts and troubles constitute a very large proportion of the total information at our disposal concerning them.

A word must now be devoted to the importance of Accounts. A complete series of Accounts, running on from year to year for a considerable period, constitutes one of the most valuable sources of historical evidence. The account books of such a corporation as the East India Company are of immense value, not merely to the historian of economic conditions, but also to the student who is seeking information of a more general character.¹ Such a series of accounts does more than afford precise and detailed evidence of the ways in which money

Other
legal
docu-
ments.

Financial
Records.

¹ The successive volumes of the *History of the Drapers' Company*, by the Rev. A. H. Johnson, which is based largely upon account books, and other financial records, throws much light upon the social and economic aspects of life in mediæval London.

was gained and expended, of the commodities produced and consumed, of the general economic and social conditions under which trade was carried on. It will provide valuable information as to the character of individuals engaging in trade, as to the organisation of commerce, as to the connection between finance and politics. Of almost equal value from the point of view of the general historian are the account books of great mercantile families, and of large estates, where these constitute a series extending over a period covered by one or more generations. In addition to supplying details of domestic life which would otherwise have escaped our notice, they help us to trace in a particular locality the working of those economic factors which effect so profoundly the prosperity of a people. From them we learn the kind of food that was eaten, the kind of clothes that were worn, the manner in which the domestic economy was organised. We can also trace the causes of the gradual decline in prosperity of one district, and follow through years its slow decay; we can observe the rise of another district to affluence and importance, and note the changes which come over society through the impoverishment of the landlords and the advantages gradually acquired by the labouring population in the economic struggle for existence.¹ Such are some of the topics upon which a series of accounts, whether of a family or of an estate, may be expected to furnish information. I need hardly insist further on their importance: for you will see that without them it is almost impossible to write the history of the economic and social progress of any country. Much material of this kind must exist in India to-day in the archive rooms of the older families; and a most fruitful source of information thus lies ready to the hand of a future investigator. It is much to be hoped that some examples of such series of accounts may be published and thus be placed at the disposal of those interested in the history

Their
uses.

¹ R. H. Tawney's book on *The Agrarian Problem in the XVIIth Century*, and Davenport's monograph on *The Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor*, are excellent examples of the employment of evidence of this kind.

of India; for until this is done, it will be impossible to investigate in any thorough fashion the social and economic changes which have come over the country in the course of centuries.

There is, however, one caution which must be observed A caution. when accounts are being employed as sources of historical evidence. Most ancient statisticians, Indian as well as European, were bitten with a craze for round numbers, especially when they conceived that the honour of a dynasty, of a family, of an estate, was in any way concerned. Particularly when we are dealing with summary statements, not itemised, must we be on our guard against a tendency to exaggeration in the total. One of the most flagrant examples of this may be found in the vast revenues assigned to the Mughal Emperors by writers connected with the court. Any one who has examined in detail the figures quoted in the *Ain Akbari*¹ or in the *Storia do Mogor*² cannot fail to be convinced that the greatest over-statements have crept in. To some extent, perhaps, this may be explained by the desire to show what the state of affairs would have been if every one had been wholly disinterested in collecting the taxes and wholly altruistic in paying them. The fact however remains, that the figures as they stand are extremely misleading, and to argue from them is a matter necessitating the utmost caution.

So much then for the Formal Non-official documents. We now come to the much larger, and infinitely more varied, class of Informal Non-official documents. Among these the historian may generally expect to find the bulk of his material, for they include all the more obvious, as distinguished from the more recondite, sources of evidence. Informal
Non-
official
Docu-
ments.

The example with which I propose first to deal is the Chronicle: that is to say, an account of events written in annalistic form, generally the work of a writer who lived about the time of the happenings he describes. I propose to deal with the chronicle in some detail; first because it is The
Chronicle.

¹ *Ayzen Akberi*, ed. Jagadis Mukhopadhyaya, Part III.

² *Storia do Mogor*, ed. William Irvine, Part III, p. 413.

36 THE HANDLING OF HISTORICAL MATERIAL

the type of historical material with which my own work has rendered me most familiar: secondly because, as I think, it affords an admirable training in critical method for the benefit of the student of history. A student who has learned how to handle chronicles, and how to make allowances for the bias of the author, for his imperfect information, for his blunders, for his obscurities of style, is in a fair way to have proved his competence to deal with other classes of historical evidence.

Chronicles
and
Histories.

The authors of these chronicles generally dignify their productions by the name of histories, but modern parlance refuses to recognise them as such for several reasons. It will be worth while to spend a moment in examining these reasons, which serve to illustrate the difference between ancient and modern methods of historical writing. In the first place the typical chronicler, unlike the typical historian, notes down his events just as they occur in course of time, without troubling to arrange them in any logical order. One event is only connected with the next because it happened soon afterwards, or, worse still, because the chronicler happened to hear of the second soon after he heard of the first. Instead of following the historian's plan of gathering together into a harmonious sequence the causes and the effects of great events and of showing how great movements arose from the gradual operation of many different forces, the chronicler generally puts all his material together in indiscriminate fashion, his sole test of arrangement being the year when such and such an event happened—and even this he will sometimes get wrong! Let us take a purely imaginary example to point the difference between the chronicle and the history, and to give those who have never had occasion to deal with chronicles some idea of what such a piece of writing is like. The first entry on the page of a chronicle may deal with the accession of a king. The writer will probably supply a little information about the king, describe the coronation ceremony, and tell us whether he was good-looking or not. Many interesting details will be given, but just as we are settling ourselves to read an account

of the king's reign, the chronicler will put in a paragraph dealing with something quite irrelevant, perhaps a description of a miracle worked by some local saint about the time when the king was crowned. And instead of going on to tell us more about the miracles worked by the saint at other times, the following paragraph will perhaps deal with a famine which occurred in another country. To judge from the space allotted by the writer to each item, it would appear fairly certain that he looked upon them as being equally important. Now, a modern historian, when confronted with the same series of events, would deal with them in fashion very different. All available material about the king and his reign would be collected and put together into consecutive narrative. If the famine were important, it would probably receive several pages all to itself in a chapter dealing with the working of economic and social forces during the period. The saint would probably not be mentioned unless his cult happened to possess a very definite bearing upon politics or upon religion. From this imaginary example it may be observed that between the chronicle and the history there are two main differences, one connected with method and the other with matter. First, the chronicle confines itself to relating what happened, while the history explains the causes of the happening and the effects of it. Secondly, the chronicle is indiscriminating, while the history is selective.

From the foregoing, you will easily realise that the principal disadvantage of the chronicle, when considered as a source of historical evidence, is its lack of proportion. Every one who has read much modern historical writing will know how extremely difficult most men find it to distinguish between information which is essential, information which is supplementary, and information which is irrelevant. But the old chroniclers entirely failed to realise that the distinction was worth making. In consequence, they have preserved a large amount of unessential information, at the cost of omitting many things which we need to know if we are to understand fully the matters they are relating. But there is a further

reason for this lack of due proportion. Most chroniclers fall victims to the common temptation of describing at great length any event, however unimportant, concerning which they imagined themselves to be in possession of information not generally current; while they push into the background the most important events of the time, if these happen to have taken place in some other locality, or if no interesting details about them were immediately accessible. Two very striking examples which my own recent work has brought home to me will serve to illustrate this weakness. Let any one who reads the *Humāyūn Nāma* compare the space which the estimable Gulbadan Begam devotes to the marriage festivities of Hindal Mirza¹ with the two lines in which she describes the advance of Shir Shah from Behar,² and let the reader then reflect upon the relative importance, even at the time, of the two events. Now the Begam was a wise and judicious lady, and when the work of her pen is marred by defects of this sort, we may well be prepared for far worse things in the case of inferior minds. The empty-headed Ananda Ranga Pillai, perhaps a typical example of a prolix and tiresome chronicler, spends upon the visit of Mafauz Khan to Pondicherry in 1747,³ ten times the space he devotes to the all-important quarrel between Dupleix and La Bourdonnais.⁴

Defects of
the
Chronicle.

The first disadvantage, then, of the chronicle as a source of historical evidence is its failure to discriminate between the trivial and the important. The second disadvantage is really a consequence of the particular quality which gives a chronicle its chief value—that which may be termed, for want of a better expression, its *isolation*. For the importance of the chronicle as historical material lies principally in this: the sources from which its information was derived, whether the written or the spoken word, have perished, so that without

¹ *Humāyūn Nāma*, ed. Beveridge (Oriental Translation Fund), p. 126 seq.

² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³ The Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Dupleix, vol. III, p. 323.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

the interposition of the chronicler, the information would be lost beyond all hope of recovery. This, of course, places the chronicler in a position of great advantage. The mere fact that the chronicle is based upon information which we do not possess makes it extremely difficult to check any statements which the writer may choose to put forward. Although we can often make a shrewd guess at the source whence his information was derived, we can never be certain of it: his statements may rest upon personal experience, reliable testimony, or wildest rumour. Therefore, it follows that nothing can be taken for granted; but each separate piece of information must be treated as something to be scrutinised by itself, to be accepted or rejected on its own merits. This is one of the most important cautions to be borne in mind when chronicles are being employed as sources of historical evidence. Among other things, it serves to explain the statement, which at first sight seems paradoxical, that a stupid chronicler is often more valuable than a clever one. Writers both clever and stupid, being but human, have private likes and dislikes, so that the possibility of personal bias can never be overlooked. But setting this consideration aside for the moment, it remains broadly true to say that the unintelligent man generally puts an event into writing much in the form in which it came under his notice, while the clever man is prone to comment upon it, to add information of his own, and then to serve up the resulting composition in such a manner as to make it appear that all the ingredients were derived from a single source.¹ Hence, the historian who is employing as his guide an unintelligent chronicler can generally be much more certain of the reliability of his information; particularly if the chronicler, as not infrequently happens, makes it quite clear that he did not well understand the matters with which he was dealing. In the case of a clever and painstaking chronicler, on the other hand, the historian can never be quite sure to what extent

¹ Cf. my paper on *St. Alban in Legend and History* in the *Bulletin of the Departments of History and Economics*, Queen's University, Canada, 1913.

the personality of the writer interposes as a barrier between the reader and the information of which he is in search. And that is why any one who has practical experience of such matters would far rather rely upon a plain, somewhat matter-of-fact writer like Firishta than upon a really brilliant writer like Abu'l Fazl Allami. The next consideration is the candour and honesty of the writer. Is he a partisan? If so, he will suppress some facts which make against his side, and will represent other facts as though they showed his party to be in the right. But in doing so he will probably betray himself and so put us on our guard against accepting all his facts in the guise in which he puts them forward. On the other hand, if he shows no sign of bias in one direction or another, his opinions upon disputed points may be accepted as useful evidence. We may perhaps sum up the above considerations by the use of a homely metaphor. It is hardly too much to say that an impartial and simple-minded writer is like a pane of clear glass, which allows the light of information, whether good or bad, to arrive at the modern historian almost without interference, while the philosophical or partisan chronicler is like a pane of stained glass, which makes the light look much more beautiful by throwing it into all kinds of varied and interesting patterns, but alters it essentially in its passage. So much for the glass; but what of the light which passes through it?

The value
of the
chroni-
cler's
infor-
mation.

If we knew all the circumstances connected with the writing of a given chronicle, it would be a comparatively simple matter to determine its value as a source of historical evidence. The difficulty is, of course, that we do not possess the necessary information; so that we have to arrive at a conclusion upon insufficient premises, as a rule based principally upon the chronicle itself, supplemented, perhaps, by a little information concerning the personality of the chronicler. Generally, we have the text, and very little else, to guide us. Now, when we come to consider the reliability of the writer's statements, it is necessary to bear in mind what has already been said as to the desirability of scrutinising each statement separately.

Not even the best chronicle is equally good in all its parts. About some events the writer may have been exceptionally well informed; he may have talked to people who took part in them, or he may even have taken part in them himself. With regard to other events, however, his testimony will be distinctly inferior in value; he may have heard of them only at third or fourth hand, and his information may be in large degree unreliable. Distance in space or in time often played a considerable part in the perversion of truth. In days when news travelled with much greater difficulty than is the case at present, it was a justifiable presumption that the farther a man was removed from the spot where or from the time when any particular event took place, the less likely was he to know anything reliable concerning it. This presumption remains generally, though not universally, true in the case of the writers of chronicles. The farther the writer lived from the scene of the events he describes, the greater is the probability that he had nothing better to rely upon than current gossip; and gossip, if it travels far, loses so little in the telling that it becomes almost unrecognisable. Also, the longer the interval of time separating the chronicler from that about which he writes, the greater the probability that the information is not really his own, but is derived from a source used more or less intelligently, a source which is neither authenticated nor discredited by the accuracy or inaccuracy of other portions of the chronicle. An example which may serve to illustrate this is supplied by Manucci's *Storia do Mogor*. Because Manucci is an important source of evidence for the reign of Aurangzib it must not be assumed that what he says about the earlier Mughal emperors possesses any value whatsoever.¹ In point of fact, his information upon this topic is strikingly misleading, even in the case of a monarch so recent as Akbar. Were it not for the name, it would be impossible to recognise the most brilliant of the Mughals in Manucci's absurd Don Juan-like figure, the hero of scandalous adventures, who pursues his amours unremittingly to the detriment of his affairs of state.

¹ *Storia do Mogor*, Part I, pp. 110-154.

In the case of a contemporary writer, however, the matter is much simplified. From the mere way in which the writer tells his story, it is generally possible to discover whether he is relying upon hearsay, or whether he is in possession of information derived from a reliable source. If the account is full, picturesque, and precise in detail, it is generally safe to conclude that he has come into contact with information of some value. On the other hand, if he confines himself to a bald statement of facts, telling his story without gusto, giving few details of an intimate character, and displaying no particular interest in what he is saying, we may be fairly certain that he has at his disposal only such information as he expects to be in the possession of a well-informed reader. Take, for example, the account which Al-Baihaki gives of Sultan Mas'ud's drinking party.¹

Ocular
testimony
and bald
narrative.

"After their departure, the Amir said to Abdu-r Razzak: 'What say you, shall we drink a little wine?' He replied: 'When can we better drink than on such a day as this, when my lord is happy, and my lord's son has attained his wish, and departed with the minister and officers; especially after eating such a dinner as this?' The Amir said, 'Let us commence without ceremony, for we have come into the country, and we will drink in the Firozi Garden.' Accordingly much wine was brought immediately from the Pavilion into the garden, and fifty goblets and flagons were placed in the middle of a small tent. The goblets were sent round, and the Amir said: 'Let us keep fair measure, and fill the cups evenly, in order that there may be no unfairness.' Each goblet contained half a *man*. They began to get jolly, and the minstrels sang. Bu-l Hasan drank five goblets, his head was affected at the sixth, he lost his senses at the seventh, and began to vomit at the eighth, when the servants carried him off. Bu-l Ala, the physician, dropped his head at the fifth cup, and he also was carried off. Khalil Daud drank ten; Siyabiruz nine; and both were borne away to the Hill of Dailaman. Bu Na'im drank twelve, and ran off. Daud Maimandi fell down drunk, and the singers and buffoons all rolled off tipsy, when the Sultan and Khawaj' Abdu-r Razzak alone remained. When the Khwaja had drunk eighteen cups, he made his obeisance and prepared to go, saying to the Amir, 'If you give your slave any more, he will lose his respect for your majesty, as well as his own wits.' The Amir laughed and gave him leave to go; when he got up and departed in a

¹ Elliot and Dowson. *History of India*, II, p. 245.

most respectful manner. After this, the Amir kept on drinking and enjoying himself. He drank twenty-seven full goblets of half a *man* each. He then arose, called for a basin of water and his praying carpet, washed his face, and read the midday prayers as well as the afternoon ones, and so acquitted himself, that you would have said he had not drunk a single cup."

Even without the express statement of the writer's presence at the scene, which is made immediately afterwards, we should have known that the genial Abu'l Fazl possessed information of no ordinary kind. A description at once so vivid and so detailed could not have been penned except from the testimony of an eye-witness. •

Compare this, for example, with Gulbadan Begam's account of her father's greatest military achievement :—

"On Friday, Rajab 8th, 932 H. (Babur) arrayed battle against Sultan Ibrahim, son of Sultan Sikander, son of Bahlul Lodi. By God's grace he was victorious, and Sultan Ibrahim was killed in the fight. His victory was won purely by the Divine grace, for Sultan Ibrahim had a lak and 80,000 horse, and as many as 1500 head of fierce elephants ; while his Majesty's army with the traders, and good and bad, was 12,000 persons, and he had at the outside 6000 or 7000 serviceable men." ¹

The fact that the event first described was of no importance, while the second was the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Hindustan, only makes the difference in the descriptions more striking. It is unnecessary to spend further space on pointing the contrast between the account of a trivial scene by an eye-witness, and the account of a landmark in history by one who had no special knowledge to impart.

Perhaps next in importance among the considerations which determine the value of a chronicle as a source of historical evidence, is the style of the writer. From our point of view, the style of a chronicle depends upon two factors. First, does the author write lucidly ? Secondly, does he write with precision ? The former is rather a question of the language, the latter, one of the mind, of the writer. And in order that a chronicle shall be of the highest service as historical material,

The importance of style.

¹ *Humāyūn Nāma*, p. 94.

it must not only be so written that the meaning of the author is clearly apparent from the words he uses, but, in addition, it must contain precise statements, not vague generalisations. Probably it is true to say that very few chronicles entirely satisfy these conditions. So far as my own experience may be trusted, oriental writers are rather more inclined to ignore the first requisite than the second. The almost universal employment of stately and high-flown language, with the object of impressing the reader, often makes the exact meaning of the writer very obscure. In the writers of mediæval Europe the weaknesses would seem to be almost equally balanced. The kind of Latin they used was too flexible, the meaning of the words changed too often, to allow us to be certain that we are attaching to his phrases the precise meaning which the writer himself intended them to bear. Also the European chroniclers, while they too often share with Oriental chroniclers a contempt for mere facts and dates, are in addition frequently too lazy to make a precise statement when they think that a resounding phrase from Cicero, or, worse still, from Lactantius, will exhibit their learning or conceal their ignorance.

Accuracy
in chroni-
cles.

The final demand made by the historian from the chronicler is accuracy. The reason why this demand is placed last instead of first may require some explanation. Accuracy, as applied to chronicles, is a relative term; perhaps, indeed, the word carefulness would better express my meaning. Every chronicler of whom I have heard, to say nothing of every chronicler whose work I have inspected, makes certain mistakes, sometimes upon questions of fact, more often upon questions of chronology. There are, however, reasonable limits to this inaccuracy; and when the chronicler makes a definite statement, which proves on examination to be entirely baseless, the investigator has some right to grumble. Mistakes of this kind are generally to be ascribed to carelessness of some sort; the common plan employed by chroniclers of jotting down events upon separate slips of paper before working the narrative up into its final form made it very easy to enter an event under a year to which it did not belong. In consequence, the next

writer who comes along, not content with copying the mistake, will not improbably invent some fanciful reason to explain why the event took place at such an unexpected time. The third writer perhaps confirms the error by embodying both mistake and imaginary explanation in his own narrative.¹ You will easily see, from this consideration alone, the necessity for the precaution, on which so much stress has been laid, of criticising with the utmost care every statement made by a chronicler, no matter how reliable may be other parts of his narrative.

I now pass on to the second of the principal types of Memoirs. Informal Non-official documents, namely, Memoirs. These may be divided for convenience into three kinds, each of which must be examined briefly. The first kind consists of itineraries and travellers' narratives. Material of this character presents features of particular interest to the historian, although it requires as careful handling as any other kind. Its great value as evidence lies in the fact that the traveller, being generally a foreigner, takes notice of things which a native of the country would pass over as too obvious and too familiar to be described; and these are sometimes just the things about which the modern historian stands most in need of information. This is particularly likely to be the case where the traveller belongs to a type of civilisation entirely different from that of the people among whom he is sojourning. He makes his observations from a point of view very far removed from that of the native writers, and his account is therefore of great assistance to subsequent investigators, who desire to arrive at an unbiassed conclusion concerning an individual, a dynasty, or a nation. It is unnecessary to insist upon the value of the narratives of such famous travellers as Hiuen Tsang, Marco Polo, and ibn Batuta, whose names are household words to students. But travellers whose reputation as men of letters is not so great as that of the foregoing, often leave narratives which as historical material are of the highest value. Some of the

Travel-
lers'
Tales.

¹ There are some excellent examples of this type of error to be found in the materials employed by Abbot in his *St. Thomas of Canterbury*.

Europeans who travelled through the realms of the "Great Mogul," have left such detailed accounts of what they saw and heard that it is almost impossible to study the period without referring to them at every turn, and this despite the existence of excellent contemporary historians of the country. Among the most important of these accounts may be mentioned those which have been left by Sir Thomas Roe, William Hawkins, François Bernier, and Nicolo Manucci.¹ But it is perhaps almost superfluous to say that travellers' narratives, like every other kind of material with which the historian has to deal, are subject to certain defects peculiar to themselves, necessitating the observance of special precautions for their proper employment. In the first place the traveller, just because of that detachment from his surroundings which gives his testimony such value, fails to understand much of what he sees, so that his account, even where it is substantially accurate, is liable to mislead the reader. Secondly, in collecting his information, he is naturally driven to rely far too much upon mere gossip, and is to some extent at the mercy of his informants. Nor are deliberate attempts to impose upon the credulity of the traveller at all uncommon. Much of what the priests of Memphis told Herodotus was probably intended to mislead him, and was certainly untrue; but the "Father of History" has recorded it all in the most perfect good faith, to the mystification of posterity. Similarly, many of the stories so diligently collected by Nicolo Manucci concerning the history of the earlier Mughal emperors seem to have been pure bazaar gossip, with but the slenderest foundation in fact.² But there is a further point to be considered. The accounts left by travellers are but rarely in the form of a journal; frequently they are written down in the old age of a wanderer, or at least, after an interval of many years. There is, therefore, ample scope both for the exercise of imagination in

Their
defects.

¹ For those who desire a short concise account of these travellers and their work, E. F. Oaten's book, *European Travellers in India*, has much to recommend it.

² *Storia de Mogor*, I, pp. 110-154, etc.

supplementing the defects of memory, and for the perpetration of blunders in all good faith. The clearness of early impressions has passed away, with the result that the details of one event may easily be confused with those of another, and an anecdote connected with some person or place is transferred to another person or place to which it has no reference. For such reasons as these, the inaccuracy of "travellers' tales" has become a by-word; not perhaps undeservedly for the most part. It is therefore necessary to remember, that, valuable as these itineraries and log-books are to the historian, their use is to assist him in forming impressions rather than in supplying him with facts. They will give him a clearer idea of what the country looked like at a particular time: of what its rulers were like to see and to speak with: of what its inhabitants were like in their ordinary life. So long as we remember that the traveller is rather describing impressions than detailing facts, we shall not go far wrong in our handling of his evidence.

The second class of Memoirs with which we have to deal Autobiographies. consists of Autobiographies, consisting generally of personal recollections of great events, written by those whose fortune it was to be concerned in them.¹ These recollections are of particular value in that they frequently contain facts not otherwise obtainable concerning the forces which worked beneath the surface of events; they tell the "secret history" of important crises; they clear up much that would otherwise remain a mystery. But their employment as historical material calls for the exercise of the utmost caution. They are mostly biassed, despite their common parade of impartiality: they are generally designed to exhibit the virtues of the writer and expose the vices of his opponents: they are often disingenuous, distorting facts and imputing motives in a manner calculated to serve the particular end for which they are designed.

Some times, indeed, these memoirs are nothing but special pleading, requiring as careful examination as the speech of a

¹ Such, for example, as the *Mémoires* of Cardinal de Retz; or the *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* of Bismarck.

Reminis-
cences.

Counsel for the Defence. Moreover, as they are generally written at the close of life, many years subsequent to the events they describe, they often contain serious errors of fact, due to the failing memory of the author. Some of the astonishing mistakes which have crept into such works as Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* can only be explained by assuming that at the time when they were written the memories of the authors were beginning to play them false. The last type of Memoir consists of the recollections of those who were brought into contact with great events rather as spectators than as actors; who were tolerated by prominent men rather than received by them as equals. Memoirs of this kind were often written frankly for the amusement of the author, for the entertainment of the reader, or for both. In consequence, they have less of the bias, as well as of the bitterness, which are so markedly characteristic of the writings of greater men. On the other hand, they often possess a form of bias peculiar to themselves. They are too prone to lavish undeserved praise upon the particular person or group of persons most intimately known to the author. The memoirs of such men as Al Baihaki and Pepys, with their gossiping anecdotes of places and of persons, are often delightful reading; but as historical material are generally of the second rank. Sometimes, indeed, as is the case with Wilhelm Busch's *Recollections of Bismarck*, there is an intimate vein of reminiscence which actually throws new light upon the character and personality of a prominent personage. Generally speaking, however, memoirs of this type are valuable principally for their illustrations of the manners and customs of contemporary society, for the snatches of conversation or the occasional anecdote which exhibits some famous personage in an unusual light, and for the minute particulars of dress, habit, and personal mannerism which so often escape the notice of writers possessing a higher sense of their own importance.

Corre-
spond-
ence.

I now pass on to the next class of Informal Non-official material—private correspondence. This is another extremely important source of historical evidence; the more so that

much of what would now be accounted official correspondence was formerly regarded as the private correspondence of a particular official. It therefore happens that among the private papers of prominent historical personages, there will generally be found many documents dealing with public affairs of the highest importance; and it is impossible to examine the family archives of any of the older English families without coming upon many papers which ought, strictly speaking, to be housed in the Public Record Office. However, putting this consideration on one side, private correspondence, in the accepted sense of the term, presents features of great interest to the historian. Its principal function is to furnish details, of a kind not otherwise available, of the conditions of social life prevailing at the time. A mass of private letters will frequently throw a vivid light upon the character of existence in a particular locality; and while such letters rarely contain references to events of first-rate importance, they frequently supply information which serves to exhibit such events in their true proportion.¹ It is difficult to exaggerate the debt owed by modern historians to such collections of correspondence as that which passed between members of the Paston family in fifteenth-century England. From these letters there can be gathered many particulars concerning the standards of education, morality, and refinement current among particular classes of society, of a kind such as are obtainable from no other source of historical evidence whatever. Further, since they are generally intended for the eye of relations or of intimate friends, these letters are as a rule written both simply and candidly. From the point of view of the historian, however, private correspondence suffers from two principal defects. First, the information contained in the letters is almost necessarily imperfect; except where strictly local and strictly personal matters are concerned, the facts are often the reverse of reliable. The wildest rumours are reported, and the exaggerations so typical of local gossip frequently make their appearance. The second

¹ Among the classical examples of this type of material may be mentioned the Letters of Cicero and the Letters of Erasmus.

difficulty is this: private correspondence is generally very diffuse in character. A vast deal of chaff has to be sifted by the historian in order that a little good grain may be discovered. By a singular fatality, it is often the correspondence of the least important people that has been preserved to us in the most perfect condition. There are, fortunately, many exceptions to this statement, but on the whole, it is surprising how frequently the historian finds himself compelled to wade through bundle after bundle of old letters, without possessing the smallest desire to know anything at all about the people who wrote them or the people who read them, either because he has reason to believe that some mention is made of other persons in whom he is interested, or because he desires to gain a clearer and more definite impression of social life in general or of the conditions of existence in a particular locality.

This is the last of the kinds of historical material which we set ourselves to examine; and although the system of classification which I have adopted cannot claim to be exhaustive, I think it will be found that all the more important species of historical material fall into place under one or other of these summary headings. It is to be hoped that my audience now possesses a clearer idea of some of the lines along which the modern historian must work, and a more definite impression that the writing of history, like most other technical employments, is not quite the simple affair which at first sight it appears to be.

LECTURE III

PITFALLS IN THE PATH OF THE HISTORIAN

PITFALLS IN THE PATH OF THE HISTORIAN

1. The Historian himself.
 - (a) Ancient and Modern conceptions of his function—the Dangers attending the Modern employment of the Theoretical Element.
 - (b) Difficulty of preserving the Impartial Attitude of Mind.
 - (c) Difficulty of separating the Provinces of Theory and Fact.
2. The Marshalling of his Evidence.
 - (a) Difficulty of obtaining adequate Quantity of Evidence.
 - (b) Difficulty of weighing Evidence when obtained.
3. The presentation of his Conclusions.
 - (a) Discrimination of Essential and Non-essential Elements.
 - (b) Style.

LECTURE III

IN the two previous lectures, which dealt with the classification and the handling of the different kinds of historical material, we examined in some little detail the stuff with which the historian has to work, gaining by the way, I hope, a more adequate conception of the varied, as well as the complicated, nature of that material. Each particular species, as we noticed, possesses certain advantages and certain drawbacks when considered from the point of view of the evidence it can furnish. From one source, we concluded, the historian must be content to draw a general, if vivid, impression of the characteristics presented by social life in a particular epoch : from another, he may learn the arguments by which a luckless and discredited minister strove to justify himself in the eyes of a world which concerns itself less with intentions than with achievements : from yet a third, he may confidently expect to discover authentic details of the most intimate affairs of state. But whatever may chance to be the particular kind of information of which the historian is in search, whatever may be the species of material upon which he is working, his critical faculties must ever be on the alert. He must walk delicately, he must employ the utmost caution, he must refrain from jumping to conclusions. Step by step the firm road which he is building for the benefit of others must be tested and retested, until there remains no room for doubt that the foundation and superstructure are alike solid and unassailable. Yet with all his caution, it is idle to suppose that he can escape falling into error. The historian possesses, indeed, from the very nature of his work, a better excuse for error

The
historian's
difficul-
ties.

than many of his fellow labourers in other departments of knowledge, for with whatever care he works, he has no means of testing the final results of his investigation. He has no laboratory in which he can prove by actual observation the adequacy or inadequacy of the explanations he frames to account for the course taken by past events. He can conduct no experiments: the phenomena he investigates cannot be made to repeat themselves at his will until their mere repetition suffices to force upon his mind conclusions from which there is no escape. The whole value of his work therefore depends upon the elimination of error during the process by which he arrives at his results; for when that result has once been achieved, the presence of error can but rarely be detected, owing to the absence of any test by which the conclusion of the whole matter may be tried. It is therefore worth spending some time in considering some of the commonest pitfalls which surround the path of the historian, and this for two reasons: first, that the difficulties of that path may be perceived by those who are not called upon to follow it, and secondly, that those of us whose business it is to engage in historical research may, by recounting the mistakes of others, chance to avoid some of the more obvious types of error so far as our own work is concerned.

Pitfalls in
his path.

The pitfalls among which the historian is called upon to thread his path are of three principal kinds. They may be treated very conveniently in tripartite form, according as they refer more particularly to the investigator himself, to the marshalling of his evidence, or to the manner in which he proceeds to his conclusions.

The
historian
himself.

First, as regards the historian himself. We have already gained some notion of the exacting nature of the demands made upon him by the newer conceptions of historical writing; but in order to make our ideas more definite, we may perhaps glance once more at the state of affairs which now exists no longer. In the old days, a historian was expected to relate facts, not to discover explanations of their significance. There was, indeed, a notion that he was responsible for the accuracy

of his facts, but he certainly stood in a privileged position in regard to them. He was expected to treat of events which he had himself witnessed, or of which he had heard from those possessing peculiarly intimate knowledge. So that while what was primarily expected from the historian was an accurate account of events, preferably of exciting events, there was very little prejudice against a personal interpretation of them, which was regarded as something merely incidental. Many of the older writers took full advantage of this attitude on the part of their public, "making"—to employ Robert Louis Stevenson's phrase—"no charge for the colouring." Perhaps the most striking instance is that supplied by the curious series of changes which befell the first book of Froissart's Chronicle. This work, one of the most vivid pieces of descriptive writing produced by mediæval Europe, treats principally of the wars waged between the French and the English during the latter half of the fourteenth century. When the first version was written, Froissart was looking for favour from the court of the third Edward—nor was he disappointed. His work, as might have been expected, was strongly English in sympathy. Every conflict between the two nations is treated from the English point of view, and it is the deeds of English knights that are principally singled out for praise. But by the time the Second Book of the Chronicle was completed, a change had come over the circumstances of the author. His English friends were dead, his English gold had been spent, and he was living at the court of a noble who sided with the French. The Second and Third Books, accordingly, were French in sympathy, and Froissart, with a fine sense of consistency, revised the First Book in order to bring it into harmony with the other two. Incidents which had once redounded to the credit of the English were now depicted from the opposite point of view; English defeats were converted into French victories, and Gallic knighthood was extolled as the flower of Christian chivalry. Finally, towards the very end of his life, Froissart revisited England, and being so fortunate as to discover, among many strangers, a few old friends, felt his

heart, warm once more towards the nation which had received him so favourably in the days of his youth. Accordingly, a third edition of the First Book was completed, in which the sympathies of the author were once more enlisted on the side of the English. There are some doubts, indeed, as to whether this third redaction of the First Book ever came into circulation; but it certainly exists in manuscript in the Vatican Library. It is not so uncompromisingly English in tone as was the first version of all, for an attempt is made to give the French point of view from time to time. But the change from the second, the French version, is extremely marked; the English are once more heroes of the narrative. It would be interesting to know whether Froissart would have made any more alterations if suitable occasion had offered; but as he died quite soon after completing his third version, he had no opportunity of carrying matters further. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole incident is this: no one thought any the worse of Froissart, either as a man or as an historian, for thus trimming his sails to suit the wind. Think for a moment what would be said of a Sorel, a Delbrück, or a Ferrero who should suddenly alter his opinions in such a fashion! The explanation lies, of course, at the root of what I have throughout emphasised as the distinction between the ancient and the modern conceptions of the historian's function. When one is dealing with events pure and simple, it is an easy matter to alter the whole tone of one's narrative; it is merely a question of telling the story from the other side. But with the modern historian, the case is different. He may not adopt a professedly partisan attitude; the utmost he can do is to present his conclusions in such shape that the reader's judgment upon them follows a particular course. As he is expected not merely to relate facts, but also to account for them, he must necessarily discover for himself a carefully-reasoned theory, to explain the course taken by events. This theory constitutes as it were the backbone of his narrative, serves to retain each fact in its appointed place in an articulate whole, and determines absolutely the shape assumed by the

The
function
of theory
in modern
historical
writing.

period as he conceives of it. It follows, therefore, that any transference of the sympathies of a modern historian from one side to the other would, if carried into his narrative, entail far more than a fresh version of events; it would mean an entire recasting of the most important thing in his work, the theory which gives unity and coherence to the whole, which represents the historian's individual contribution to the interpretation of history.

I have spent so much space in thus contrasting the ancient and modern types of historical writing because I wish to emphasise the important and characteristic part played by theory in the work of the modern historian. It is not sufficient, let me repeat, for the historian to inform the reader that something happened: he must tell him why it happened, and perhaps, why some other thing did not happen. He must be prepared to show the connection between a series of facts which at first sight appear independent of one another: he must trace the development of movements extending through centuries of time: he must explain how each separate event in these movements falls into place in its relation to the whole. Now you will readily understand that it is in the presence of the connecting links which the historian must supply, of this carefully reasoned theory which serves to knit separate facts into an ordered, intelligible scheme of things, that the risk of error really lies. While its proper employment is the most valuable, as it is the most difficult, portion of the historian's work, yet he must never allow himself to forget that it proceeds from his own mind; it is something personal to himself, differing absolutely from the material out of which it is constructed. While the material can be discovered, the theory must be created. Therefore at every moment the historian must remember that, however careful he may have been to suppress his personal prejudices, and to approach his problem with an open mind, he can never be certain that his theory is entirely warranted by the facts. He is, then, on the horns of a dilemma. He cannot avoid employing this element of theory as the cement which binds his isolated facts,

Dangers
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by themselves so meaningless, into an intelligible and ordered structure; yet for aught he can tell, the cement may be faulty through the omission of some obscure but essential ingredient. It then becomes a source of weakness rather than of strength, a 'disintegrating and not a unifying influence. There is, however, one precaution which can always be taken for the safeguarding of historic truth. The reader must be left free to discover for himself, if he can, a better interpretation of the facts than that which is propounded to him by the historian, who must, indeed, make it his aim to observe the cardinal distinction between the two provinces of his work: between the facts, as they have been ascertained, and their interpretation, as it has been formulated.

Bias.

In the process of evolving his theory, the historian must, of course, keep his mind free from all conscious bias. This of itself is no easy task, when he finds himself touching upon any of the great questions upon which men are slowly agreeing to differ. It is a commonplace to say that the opinions of the average man are in great measure the product of early training and subsequent environment; and it is well known that prejudices, however irrational, acquired in childhood are the hardest things in the world to overcome. This is particularly the case with all questions of a religious nature. It is almost impossible for the historian to escape an aversion from, or a predilection for, that particular type of creed in which he was born and bred. And it is hardly necessary to remind you that of all the influences which tend most readily to the perversion of historic truth, *odium theologicum* is the most active and the most pernicious. As an illustration of this, it is only necessary to consider the different pictures presented by Hindu and Muhammedan writers respectively of the personality and achievements of such a figure as Mahmud Batshikan. To the one, he is the embodiment of all vice, to the other, the incarnation of every possible virtue. Or take Badaoni's account of the cold-blooded murder of that inoffensive, scholarly gentleman Mulla Ahmad—the pious and respected editor of the *Tarikh-i-Alfi*—by a private enemy in 996 A.H.

"During this month (Safar) Mírza Faulád Birlás persuaded the heretic Mullá Ahmad, who was always openly reviling the first Khalifs, to leave his own house at midnight under some pretence, and then assassinated him. The chronograms of which event are, 'Bravo! Faulád's stiletto!' and 'Hellish hog!' and indeed when I saw that dog in the agonies of death, I observed his countenance to be exactly like that of a hog: others also observed the same. May God protect me from such a dreadful fate!"

"Mírza Faulád was bound alive to the leg of an elephant in the city of Lahore, and thus attained martyrdom."

This sort of thing is the inevitable result of adopting a partisan attitude in debatable matters. But unfortunately, the preservation of the properly judicial attitude requires far more than the preliminary determination to approach hotly-discussed problems with an open mind. Even when the historian has convinced himself of the success of his deliberate attempt to attain an impartial outlook, he dare not relax his precautions. For all unconsciously, in the mere process of marshalling his evidence, he may acquire a strong partiality for one side or the other, so that he slips gradually into that partisan frame of mind that his business requires him to avoid. Every one of us has experienced something of the kind. In our reading, whether of the Iliad or of the latest novel, we range ourselves as Greeks or as Trojans without being able to give any satisfactory explanation of our attitude; and we do scant justice either to the persons or to the causes that chance to conflict with those which, in some mysterious manner, claim our sympathy. There is only one way of escaping this partisan spirit, which, however excusable it may be, is fatal to historic truth. Directly the historian finds himself beginning to espouse one of two contending causes, to feel certain that he knows on which side justice lies, he must deliberately check the accuracy of his judgments. There is no other course open to him but to retrace his path step by step, to revise all his estimates of motive and his determinations of right and wrong, until he is convinced, either that his suspected partiality is really justified by the facts, or, which is much more likely to

be the case, that it proceeds entirely from some hitherto unsuspected bias in his own mind.

Two
further
dangers.

There are two further dangers against which the investigator of historical problems must ever be on his guard, and each demands a certain amount of attention. The first is this. The historian must beware lest he become obsessed by any theory, however original and illuminating, to such a degree that he regards it as more important than the facts it is designed to explain; so that, indeed, he selects his facts to illustrate his theory rather than employs his theory to interpret his facts. At first sight, perhaps, this would seem to be an error of so extravagant a type that it is rarely to be found; but as a matter of experience, nothing is easier than to cite the names of illustrious writers whose work has suffered through it. Sir Henry Maine may be taken as a case in point. So learned a lawyer was he, that even his conception of the Universe might be said to be coloured by legal theory; and among his many valuable contributions to historical jurisprudence—a study of which he was in some sort the pioneer—may be found certain conclusions which are more astonishing than useful. Those of you who have read his essay on Ancient Law will remember the naïve surprise with which he hails the discovery of characteristic Roman legal institutions, such as *patria potestas* in all sorts of unlikely places. The truth is, of course, that he carried these institutions in his mind wherever he went, with the natural result that he was always discovering them in fresh connections. To employ a homely metaphor, it is very much as if a man were to tread in a pool of kerosene, and were to proceed to argue, from the odour everywhere accompanying him, that oil is an essential ingredient in the composition of every piece of natural scenery. The instance selected may serve as an example, for it can easily be paralleled. It is a peculiarity of this type of error, indeed, that it exercises a marked attraction upon intellects of more than ordinary vigour. The more powerful, the more original, the mind of a given historian, the greater is the danger of his becoming the slave, rather than the master, of the theories he propounds

with such force. This is not, of course, to deny that this pitfall counts among its victims many who cannot by any stretch of imagination be placed in the first flight of historians. Perhaps the most pernicious example is James Mill, whose *History of British India* stands unsurpassed for sheer unscrupulousness in the manipulation, and even the manufacture, of evidence in support of a preconceived theory.

The next danger is not unlike this, but is even more insidious. The historian must beware of attaching himself so closely to his theory, that he cannot bring himself to revise it in the light of any fresh facts that may come under his notice. If he is not always ready to adapt his old theory to his new facts, he will end by adapting his new facts to his old theory; and when confronted by the necessity of choosing between the two, he will prefer to stand by his theory and allow his facts to look after themselves. He is now so possessed by his theory, so convinced of its unalterable truth, that he fails to see more than a single aspect of any given question. The disastrous consequences of this attitude may assume either one of two alternative forms. First, when the historian requires a fact which is not to hand for the purpose of rounding off a pet theory, he may proceed gaily on his way as if the fact were in truth at his disposal. An example will serve to illustrate this. James Mill, in his treatment of Warren Hastings, plainly started with the assumption that the Governor-General was guilty of the grossest peculation. This assumption seemed to require that Hastings should have derived pecuniary profit from the Rohilla War, from the treasure of the Oudh begams, and finally, that he should have returned home a wealthy man. Accordingly, sinister motives are imputed to him throughout the whole of his administration;¹ and in the three matters mentioned above, the Rohilla War, the Oudh affair, and his private fortune, statements are calmly made for which there is not a shadow of foundation, simply in order that they may seem to buttress a theory as false as

¹ See particularly Book V, chapters 1-3 and 6-9: Book VI, chapters 1 and 2.

themselves.¹ An example so flagrant as this cannot probably be explained save on the assumption that there existed a grave animus in the mind of the author; but it is not hard to find instances where almost the same thing has been done in perfect good faith. The mistake arises, of course, from being so convinced of the truth of one's theory, that when the facts do not exactly fit, one assumes that it is with them, rather than with the theory, that the fault must lie.

The second consequence, while less aggravated, is none the less extremely prejudicial to the cause of truth. Obsessed by his theory, the historian is only capable of realising the significance of such facts as serve to confirm it. Everything which can be made to fit in with his preconceived idea is eagerly seized upon and used; while facts which are too stubborn to be bent into the shape required are ignored, generally because the historian simply fails to appreciate them. If we happen to be reading any one of the class of writers whom Robert Louis Stevenson has designated "good honest partisan historians," we cannot fail to observe that the author's bias is so pronounced that it has become almost instinctive. He cannot appreciate any fact which tells against the cause he is advocating, for the simple reason that its significance cannot penetrate the thick armour of prejudice which blunts his sensibilities in certain directions. And though the error in such cases might seem to be wilful, yet this pitfall is one which besets the path of every historian. Thrice blessed is he who does not occasionally flounder into it!

Against all these dangers to which the introduction of the theoretical element exposes the historian, an open mind is the only real safeguard, joined to a strong sense of the responsibility which attends those who seek after historic truth. It is a painful thing to revise a carefully constructed theory in the light of a single, apparently insignificant fact: to destroy the labour of weeks, or, it may be, of months, on account of

¹ That the whole investigation is carried on with a fine assumption of impartiality only increases, as Sir John Strachey has remarked, the seriousness of Mill's offence against historic truth.

a chance discovery which has occupied perhaps a minute. It seems so easy to gloss over the inconvenient fact, and to turn once more to the elaboration of a favourite theory. The temptation is one which comes to every investigator, and if it is not fairly faced, it will often claim a victim. But the historian, like any one else who engages in research, comes gradually to learn that truth is the only legitimate end; and that truth, when it is once attained, is the sufficient, if generally the sole, reward of the pursuer.

I now pass on to the second of the three kinds of pitfalls which threaten to engulf the historian—namely, those connected with the marshalling of his evidence. In the two previous lectures, we have entered into a brief discussion of the special difficulties connected with the different kinds of material from which this evidence is extracted. We now have to deal with cautions of a more general character. The first difficulty that the historian must endeavour to overcome is almost insuperable. He must strive to obtain all the evidence which bears upon the subject that he is investigating; or at least he must take care that nothing essential escapes him. Unless this is done either his work will fall far short of truth, or at best, he will be confronted at a later stage with the painful dilemma we have just examined; he will have either to remodel his theory in harmony with some essential piece of evidence which he has omitted to take into account, or else to harden his conscience and continue along the road he has previously marked out, ignoring or explaining away the inconvenient fact. From this it will be realised that the collection of evidence is an art of the utmost importance, and, unfortunately, an art for which no rules can be laid down. The only way to acquire it is through apprenticeship in the workshops of acknowledged masters of history. From them one learns to recognise, roughly, the kinds of evidence which ought to be available upon any given topic of study; one learns where to look for such evidence, and how to recognise its value when it is found. But with all one's precautions, one can never be quite sure that the entire body of available

The Marshalling of Evidence.

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evidence is to hand, and for that reason, as I have said before, it is an essential precaution that we should keep ourselves in such a frame of mind that we are capable of receiving and of utilising a new fact which is unexpectedly brought to our notice, even when that same fact renders worthless the labour of weeks by demonstrating the inadequacy of our carefully constructed theory.

The second difficulty is that of arriving at the true value of the evidence when it has been collected. The process is somewhat as follows.

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Having got his evidence together, the historian begins to sort it out. It will fall first of all into two broad divisions, primary and secondary; that is to say, major sources, upon which he principally relies, and minor sources, which are used to supplement the major sources in points of detail. After this preliminary classification, there comes the most delicate task of all. His authorities are sure to contradict one another in certain points, and he must carefully weigh their evidence in order to discover where lies the truth. Generally it will be found that whenever major sources contradict one another, minor sources are most useful in settling the disputed point. This they commonly do by supplying some small detail which proves inconsistent with the truth of one story, and being itself of undoubted authenticity, compels the historian to choose the other story. Sometimes, however, it happens that minor evidence is not available; and in this case, recourse must be had to the other means of settling the point in dispute. Now wherever the materials from which the conflicting evidence is taken are of different kinds, much help may be gained from a consideration of the particular strength and weakness of each kind of material, when examined in some such way as we examined it in the last two lectures. It will often be found that one of the conflicting stories is put out of court at once on the ground that the source from which it is derived is by its nature incompetent to furnish good evidence upon the particular point at issue. For example, if there is a conflict of evidence upon a question of chronology, and the

date supplied by an official document is contradicted by a contemporary chronicler of the ordinary careless type, the statement of the chronicler may safely be disregarded, as being altogether inferior in weight to the evidence of the official document. But when the conflicting statements are both derived from materials of a similar type, and when at the same time there is no minor evidence to incline the scale to one side or the other, then the critical training of the historian is tried to the utmost. Each piece of evidence has to be tested separately. In the case of an official document, we have to ask whether it is genuine, whether it is an original or a copy, whether a clerical error can have crept in. In the case of a non-official document, there is a similar series of questions. Have we the very words of the writer, or have inaccuracies been introduced, whether deliberately or unconsciously into the text? What was the writer's source of information, was it good or bad? Had he any motive for concealing facts of one particular type, or for wilfully misrepresenting those of another? Did he understand what he was writing, or can he have led his readers astray by an unconscious falsification of evidence? By putting to himself such questions as these, and by painfully eliciting the answers to them from the materials which lie to hand, the historian can usually manage to discriminate between conflicting statements, and to extricate himself from what looks at first sight like a hopeless *impasse*. But the process is lengthy and tiresome; often there is very little to show for all the time and trouble expended. On the face of things, it seems so much simpler to make up one's mind first of all to rely entirely upon one of our major sources, and to pass over in silence any conflicting statement. After all, one of the two stories must be right, and if the point is not of very much importance, is it worth while going through a long and wearisome process of analysis, in which mistakes are very likely to occur? Is it not better to make a good guess, and leave it at that? Such are some of the considerations which from time to time present themselves to the mind of the historian. But he has to

remember that whenever he finds himself unable or unwilling to carry through this tedious investigation, and decides in simple faith to rely upon one source only, his work loses all its value, and the consequence is that the process of evidence-weighting, upon which the discovery of the truth depends, is postponed until the appearance of somebody more capable or more energetic. In other words, the historian who is not prepared to go through these tiresome and confusing investigations whenever necessity demands had better lay down his pen—a fact which is hardly realised in some quarters, even at the present time.

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sions.*

I must now pass on quickly to the last of my three divisions: the pitfalls which beset the historian when he comes to the point of presenting his conclusions to the public. These are the deepest and the most formidable of all, and in them many a promising history has been engulfed. Perhaps the first difficulty is that of selecting what is essential, and rejecting what is non-essential to the course of the narrative. Upon the success with which this very difficult process is carried through depends the clearness and the readableness of the text. The historian must present a narrative, and not a note book: failing this, his work, however valuable in itself, will be unintelligible. Now this question of selection, which must be decided by each historian for himself, is the rock upon which many of the boldest discoverers are shipwrecked. They fail to see that minute details, however interesting in themselves, only serve to confuse and to irritate the reader unless they contribute directly to the elucidation of difficulties. And it is unfortunately the case that these minor points are usually the most interesting to the enthusiastic historian. Not only does he fail to realise that they have no place in the narrative, but he is unable to imagine how they can possibly be omitted. As a result, his text is overloaded with facts which do not contribute towards the justification of his conclusions: it is impossible, as the phrase goes, to see the wood for the trees: and, in consequence, no one can discover what his main conclusions are, or how he arrives at them.

In overcoming this difficulty, the historian can do much by the judicious employment of the tricks of his trade. The proper function of footnotes and appendices is precisely that of clearing the text by providing a refuge for details therefrom excluded. The reader travels smoothly along the main stream of the narrative, while in the numerous backwaters of footnotes and digressions he can see something of the difficulties of the navigation through which the historian is piloting him so shrewdly. The appendix provides a receptacle for much that is of antiquarian interest, of a kind which is well worthy of presentation in connected form, but which would hopelessly encumber and confuse the progress of the text. The footnote is principally used to convey to the reader an indication of the precise source of crucial statements, so that he can revise, or (if he may) confute, the reasonings of the historian. And in this connection it may be mentioned that all references should be full and precise, and not after the Teutonic fashion, wherein the author is content to cite the authority of books without number, giving neither page nor chapter for the benefit of the bewildered reader. Let us hope that after the war, German savants as well as German soldiers will see reason to revise their methods.

Lastly, comes the question of style, which is the most Style. difficult of subjects to treat of in a satisfactory manner. The historian differs from the man of letters in that his first aim must be lucidity rather than elegance. Generally speaking, the simpler the style, the better it is from the point of view of historical writing. An elaborate and adorned prose is apt to sacrifice accuracy to ornamentation, and to postpone truth to a piquant phrase. Picturesque language and vivid writing have, of course, their place among the stock-in-trade of the historian: indeed, they would seem to be a necessary accompaniment to a sympathetic investigation of the past. Generally, however, their part is a modest one. They may afford relief to the monotony of a simple and austere narrative, but there is little more they can do, except at such times as the historian aims at conveying to his readers a detailed

impression of the social or political *milieu* of a particular epoch. In this matter, as in many others, Ranke is the master of the new school of history. His plain, matter-of-fact style, which Heine compared to "boiled mutton with plenty of carrots," is admirably fitted to convey his cogent reasoning and perspicuous conclusions. One has only to compare him with Macaulay to realise the advantages of simplicity over elaboration. Ranke deals with great matters plainly and intelligibly, giving priceless information in an unassuming manner. Macaulay is vague and rhetorical, disguising the simplest facts in the cloak of a brilliant and meretricious style. The first author illuminates the very heart, the second does little more than tinge with prismatic glow the surface, of the subject of which he treats.

With this I must bring my remarks to a close. I fear lest some of my audience, before the end of this part of my course has been reached, may have accused me, at any rate in their own minds, of decking out the merest platitudes in sounding phrases. Some of my remarks must indeed have been painfully obvious to the trained historian, but as in Aristotle's day, it is still the obvious which requires to be pointed out most carefully, if it is not to escape our notice. And I will venture to say that if some of the precautions with which I have been dealing, but which I cannot claim to have invented, were observed more strictly by those who write upon things historical, the condition of scholarship, not merely in India, but also in Europe, would be very far removed from what it is to-day. But in this matter, as in most others, it is easy to theorise. The real difficulty comes when one attempts oneself to put theory into practice. And whatever our performance may happen to be, it may be some consolation for us to remember that our theory, at all events, is irreproachable!

LECTURE IV
PERSONALITY IN HISTORY

PERSONALITY IN HISTORY

1. Statement of the Problem.
2. Conflicting Theories.
3. Method of Procedure.
 - (a) Classical Times.
 - (b) The Middle Ages.
 - (c) Dawn of New Conditions.
4. Results.
 - (a) Two Inferences.
 - (b) Their Application to Indian History.

LECTURE IV

IN the three preceding lectures I have tried to give you an idea of the aims and methods of historical research as it is carried on under modern conditions. It cannot have escaped your notice that the investigator of historical problems, however skilful he may be, occupies a position differing essentially from that of the man who occupies himself with the phenomena of natural science. The solutions discovered by the historian are only true provisionally; and this for two reasons. In the first place, he can never prove to demonstration that the evidence upon which he relies contains all the premises necessary for the deduction of a correct conclusion: and in the second place, the very phenomena which he investigates are not of universal occurrence. The historical events which he is trying to explain have happened only once: they will not happen again, however convenient their repetition would be for purposes of experiment. It necessarily follows, then, that the conclusions of the historian are at best only true when taken in connection with the particular conditions of time, place, and circumstance upon which they are based. They have no universal application, and cannot serve as the foundation for any inductive science. This is not to condemn modern historians as "unscientific"; indeed, it is upon a frank recognition of the limitations imposed by the nature of the materials in which they work, that their best claim to be considered men of science really depends.

The realisation that a statement of cause and effect, the truth of which has been demonstrated in relation to particular conditions of time, place, and circumstance, having no universal

validity, cannot be applied indiscriminately to other conditions of time, place, and circumstance, may be considered the foundation of modern historical method. An admission that a conclusion, once true, is not always true, leads directly to that meticulous scrutiny of evidence in each individual instance, which is the principal business of the historian of to-day. In order that you may realise more clearly the necessity of distrusting generalisations claiming universal validity, even in connection with a question which might seem to invite them, I have thought it desirable, in the last lecture of the course, to discuss a topic of such character as that indicated by the title.

*The Statement
of the
Problem.*

Now the particular problem to which I would direct your attention to-day, and upon the examination of which I propose to spend the time remaining, may be called the problem of the personal equation in history. Please do not think that in the brief space at my disposal I shall attempt to resolve an abstruse question of metaphysic or to improvise a philosophy of history. My aim is far more modest. I shall merely put before you in a manner which, I fear, is somewhat desultory, a few critical reflections upon a topic which must always be of interest to students of history, and particularly, for reasons with which I hope to deal later, to students of Oriental History.

The terms of the problem may be stated somewhat as follows. What is the relation between the influence of personality and the influence of such non-personal forces as heredity and environment, over the course taken by the world's history? Or, to phrase the question in rough and ready fashion, is it truer to say with Carlyle that the Great Man shapes his surroundings, or with Buckle, that he is shaped by them?

I shall direct your attention to the work of these two men, not because I consider them in the front rank of historians, not even because they are really representative exponents each of his particular theory; but because, by their very downrightness and contempt of compromise, they serve to bring out, and indeed, to exaggerate, the difference between the alternative solutions which have been propounded to the problem we are investigating.

"The History of the World," says Carlyle, "is but the Biography of Great Men."¹ On the face of it, this theory appears to have much to commend it. None can deny that the life-work of men such as Cromwell and Bismarck has exercised a profound influence upon the events of the time in which they lived. Nor is it only through the slow course of years that personality must gather its force ere it becomes a factor of the first magnitude. In space of a few short hours, in the twinkling of an eye, rather, the man of destiny may weave a new thread into the everlasting fabric which hangs upon Time's loom. If Alexander had been content to yield to the entreaties of his soldiers on the banks of the River Beas: if Timur had abandoned himself to despair on that terrible night by the well of Khorassan, when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb, and the three faithless ones among his little following of ten stole three of his last seven horses and fled:² if Babur's buoyant temper had not again and again borne him triumphant over incredible obstacles, to exalt him at last to the empire of glorious Hindostan:³ the history of the world must have taken a different turn. Each of us, from his own reading of historical literature, can multiply such examples for himself.

With Buckle, now, the case stands exactly reversed. For him, the destinies of mankind are governed by laws as inevitable and as susceptible of demonstration as those which obtain in the physical world of nature. Individual efforts are insignificant in determining the direction which will be taken by the mass of human affairs. Men, even the greatest, are but the creatures of the age to which they belong. The personal equation, in short, is unworthy of the historian's notice; and the advance in the sum-total of the intellectual wealth of the human race, which is the only thing worth observing in history, depends, not upon individual effort, but upon the influence of climate, soil, food, and natural scenery. Let me give an example of the application of this theory to a

¹ *Heroes and Hero Worship.*

² *Tuzukat-i-Timuri*, ed. Davy and White, p. 37.

³ *Memoirs of Babur*, *passim*.

particular country, which may serve as a specimen of the extremes to which it was carried in the hands of this author. In the introduction to his *History of Civilisation*, Buckle professes to derive all the distinctive characteristics of Indian institutions, all the peculiarities of national temper, from the alleged fact that the staple food of the nation is rice. It is because the principal nutriment of the natives of India is oxygenous rather than carbonaceous in character, that it follows of necessity, "as the night the day," that caste prevails, that rents are high, that custom and law are stereotyped. The example is not happy, for indeed, as Sir John Strachey has said,¹ the case is parallel to that presented by an imaginary Indian traveller, who landing in the West Coast of Ireland and finding that the people lived on potatoes, should proceed to the assumption that potatoes were the ordinary food of natives of Europe, and should base on that single imaginary fact elaborate conclusions regarding the condition of society in Germany or in Spain.

It is not, perhaps, so easy to see the justification for this theory as it is to realise the strength of the ideas advocated by Carlyle; but it has, I believe, two considerations to commend it. There is first the fact that when we are dealing with long periods of time, the individual does seem to sink into the mass of mankind, so that when we seek to determine the causes of great national movements, the "non-personal" factors of environment and heredity seem to gain prominence at the expense of the personal equation. Secondly, it teaches us, even though the lesson be unduly emphasised, that there are always other elements, in addition to the personal equation, which must be taken into account before we can explain satisfactorily the course of events in any particular epoch.

Now, as you will readily perceive, Carlyle and Buckle stand as the poles asunder, the one stating in effect that personality is all powerful from the historian's point of view, the other, that it is impotent. Between these two extremes are ranged the bulk of historians, ancient and modern.

¹ *India, its Administration and Progress*, p. 324.

From the time of Aristotle onwards, thinking men have realised that the personalities of the principal actors in the world-drama are not the only influences which go to determine the march of events. I believe, however, that a brief examination will show that the manner in which the great masters of historical method have settled this problem will always be found to have been intimately connected not only with the particular nature of their work, but also with the circumstances under which their work was carried on. *Method of Procedure.*

Let us first of all turn our attention to the conditions which obtained during the times of classical antiquity. The characteristic feature of Mediterranean civilisation during that period was the city-state, with its small, intense, highly concentrated life. Generally speaking, the numerous minor offices of the administration went the round of the full citizens, and so many people spent so much of their time in serving the state in one capacity or another, that an intelligent understanding of political questions, as well as a working knowledge of the details of the administration, were widely diffused among the inhabitants. In many cases, questions of policy were openly discussed upon their own merits in the public assembly, and the personal credit of the proposer of any course of action was bound up with the success or failure of his programme. Even where the influence of the public assembly was small in comparison with that wielded by some individual, whether king or tyrant, this individual, whose sphere of action frequently lay within the walls of a single city, from the very closeness of his contact with those over whom he exercised authority, found himself in a very remarkable degree dependent upon their good opinion. One result of this condition of affairs is seen in the peculiarly personal aspect which political life assumed. So intimate was the connection between the public and the private capacity of the individual citizen, so close was the contact between the man and the state, that the fate of an organised political society not infrequently turned upon the personal action of a private individual. These conditions, as we should expect, are reflected very clearly in the historical *Classical times.*

writing of the time. Broadly speaking, the historians of antiquity, from Thucydides to Polybius, despite striking differences in style and method, have this in common: they agree in ascribing the very highest importance to the personal equation, less because they were blind to the influence exercised upon the destiny of a state by the forces of heredity and environment, than because their political system was calculated to place a premium upon individuality, and to suspend the weightiest national issues upon the frail thread of personal vagary and caprice.

The
Middle
Ages.

With the break-up of the Roman Empire, and the effective entrance upon the scene of the so-called Barbarian nations, the world-drama takes a new turn. The individual vanishes from sight, swallowed up by the corporation, great or small, Christian Church or guild-merchant, as the case might be. The history of Western Europe in the middle ages is less the history of the relations of individual with individual, than the history of the relations of corporation with corporation. Tradition, the very life-blood of corporate existence, is all powerful in the spheres of politics, of society, or religion. The individual is born into a corporation, and his destiny is largely governed by the accident of his birth, for in that corporation he lives, and in it he dies. Occasionally there arises some man of personality stronger than his fellows, passionately protesting against the impotence of the individual; but he finds himself doomed to struggle vainly against the overwhelming might of the forces which throw themselves into the scale against him. And it is perhaps worth noticing that the greatest tragedies of mediæval history, such as we associate with the names of Abélard, and Frederick, Wonder of the World, are concerned with these fruitless protests against the spirit of the age on the part of enlightened individuals. Significantly enough, the extent of the change which had come over society since classical times has to be gathered from the writings of contemporary historians mainly by inference. The historian's work, like much else in the middle ages, was carried on in accordance with a preconceived theory rather than in accordance with the

demands of existing conditions. Influenced principally by imitation of the writers of classical antiquity, the historians of the middle ages, under-estimating the power of custom in a society literally held together by the bonds of tradition, in their determination of the course of events persisted in ascribing to personality a weight greater than it actually possessed. But with this modification there can be little doubt that in the historical writing of the middle ages, the circumstances in which a man is placed are regarded as dominating rather than directing his activities. That an individual, however eminent, could exercise a preponderating influence over the course of history, is a conception that hardly found a place in the mind of the writers of the time.

At length the mediæval system was brought to an end by the joint working of a number of influences, which produced successively the revival of classical learning, the renaissance, and the religious reformation. Gradually was the individual emancipated from the tyranny of custom, until a vista almost limitless in extent opened itself for the development of personality. As an immediate consequence, there was a remarkable reversion to the more ancient regime, which we have seen associated with the dominance of the personal factor. From sheer reaction against the thralldom to which they had been so long subjected, the forces of personality ran riot, finding their revenge for centuries of annihilation in the exaggerated individuality of such epochs as the Italian humanistic age. But by gradual degrees the balance was restored. The entrance of the middle classes into politics, the struggle for religious and constitutional liberty, combined to moderate at last the excessive valuation which had been for the moment assigned to the influence of the individual man. From this time forward, indeed, it is broadly true to say that wherever an historian of eminence fails to take sufficient account of the non-personal influences in national development, examination will generally reveal the presence of some special circumstances which serve to explain the error in his analysis of the causes of events. In the case of the English historian Clarendon, for

Dawn of
New Con-
ditions.

example, there can be little doubt that his marked inclination to exaggerate the importance of the personal factor in the politico-religious struggle which he describes, springs first from his own intimate acquaintance with the leading actors whose names were linked with every stage of the tragedy of the Great Civil War : and secondly, from the social and religious prejudices which prevented him from understanding the extent to which the national temper was affected, on the one hand by ideals with which he had no sympathy, and on the other, by currents of opinion which were wholly independent of the personality of this man or of that. Again, to take an example of a more recent day. The tendency which some have remarked in Leopold von Ranke, to lay undue stress on the influence exercised by the individual man upon some slow, age-long process of national development, is probably to be explained by the keen delight he himself experienced in the handling of the letters, memoirs, and other personal documents, of which he made such new and such brilliant use. Absorbed as he was in the fortunes of those whose lives he delighted in investigating, he was sometimes led to exaggerate the importance of the part they played in shaping the course of history. Very much the same might be said of Carlyle, whose uncompromising views as to the omnipotence of personality have already been noticed. Passionately interested in the development of character, caring little for the history of institutions save in so far as they bore directly upon the fortunes of the individual, he naturally concerned himself with those periods when vast social or political conflagrations threw some strong personality into relief against a background of stormy light. Hence, concentrating himself almost exclusively upon the Great Man, he allowed too little influence to the non-personal forces which contributed towards Greatness.

Now it is probable, I think, that from the occasional failure of such distinguished historians to allow due weight to the non-personal factors in their analysis of the causes of events, sprang, by sheer reaction, the self-styled Scientific school of history. Starting from Montesquieu, and drawing a powerful

impetus from the advances in natural science which marked the beginning of the nineteenth century, this school reached its logical extreme in the positivist theory of history which Buckle borrowed from Comte. That Buckle carried it to unjustifiable lengths must be admitted by all; Lord Acton, in fact, not content with slaying it out of hand in his trenchant essay on *Mr. Buckle's Theory of History*, invoked a solemn curse on any attempt to resuscitate the corpse.

Let us now sum up the results of this brief survey. We have RESULTS. seen in the first place that the solutions which have been propounded to our problem have varied from age to age in accordance with the general characteristics of the period. Historians writing at a time which favoured the free development of individuality are inclined to consider the personal factor as predominant. On the other hand, if conditions are such that the individual experiences difficulty in asserting himself against the overwhelming force of convention and custom, there is a tendency to minimise the influence of personality upon the course of events. Secondly, the manner in which the problem is solved varies from historian to historian, according as his inclination, or the nature of his work, or the influence of other writers, sways the balance to one side or the other.

From these results we shall be justified, I think, in drawing Two In- two inferences. The first and most important is this. The ferences. question of the relative influence of the personal and non-personal factors in determining the course of history, like other problems falling within the province of the historian, does not admit of an absolute answer. It is possible to find a provisional solution which shall be true for certain fixed conditions of time, place, and circumstances, but the truth of that solution will depend upon the prevalence of these conditions, and will have no general application. To ask a historian whether the man shapes the age or the age the man, is like asking him what is the best form of government. He can only reply, "It all depends." In neither case can the questions be answered by any process of *a priori* reasoning, apart from the data afforded by particular circumstances.

And the second inference is this. The estimate which even the greatest historians have formed as to the relative importance of the personal and the non-personal factors is by no means unimpeachable, even within the limits of a particular epoch. There is great need of careful inquiry, so that bias, whether derived from the personality of the writer, from the characteristic features of the period with which he deals, or from circumstances amidst which he wrote, may be detected and discounted. And I venture to think that both these inferences are of particular value to us as students of Indian history.

Their
Applica-
tion to
Indian
History.

In the first place, by way of general caution, be it observed that we must be careful not to assume that principles of politics or of government which are true with reference to Western Europe will have any validity when applied to Oriental conditions. Because the history of England, France, and Germany has hitherto proceeded along certain well marked lines, we are not justified in concluding that these lines either have governed in the past or will govern in the future the development of India. The circumstances of the East are not those of the West; and a recognition of this fact is the first step towards a just appreciation of the special character of the problems of Indian history. In the second place, with reference to the particular problem under discussion, we must beware of imagining that any hard and fast rule can be laid down as to the influence exerted by the personal and non-personal factors in determining the course of the history of India. This caution is the more necessary because there are two powerful characteristic features of the Oriental polity which, especially to the investigator whose historical teaching has been conducted along Western lines, suggest that the personal factors are always supreme. The first is the relatively simple structure of the Oriental despotic state, which, in the absence of formal constitutional restraints upon the sovereign, contrasts so strongly with the politics of Western Europe. Everything, at first sight, would seem to depend upon the caprice of the handful of men who direct the administration. But before

long it is realised the force of religious tradition, the fear of revolution, and the menace of palace intrigue, represent sanctions as definite and as formidable as anything which Western society can suggest. The second is the typically Oriental notion of the inherent sanctity of authority.¹ Political authority, being the gift of God, confers upon its possessor, at least in theory, an unquestioned control over the life and fortune of the individual citizen. With such a spectacle before us, it is easy to forget the gulf which divides the classes interested in politics from those over whose unmoved and uncomprehending heads pass the greatest political changes, without any visible effect. So great is this gulf that, as we know, it taxes the remarkable combination of furious energy and wrong-headed ingenuity which distinguishes a Muhammad bin Tughlak, to exert any real influence upon both classes alike. The kind of ruler whom Sa'adi describes, just because he controls his immediate associates so entirely, can have little energy to spare, comparatively speaking, for the purpose of exercising an effective influence upon the destinies of the mass of his people.

The last lesson which can be learnt from our examination of the problem of personality in history is this. The material with which the student of Indian history is called upon to deal, largely consisting as it does of official correspondence, memoirs, and the lucubrations of court historians, is precisely of a character to lend undue emphasis to the influence of the personal equation in politics. It is for this reason that we need to be specially on our guard against two dangers. The first is that the court historian, whose object was to extol the omnipotence of his patrons, generally ascribes to them an excessive influence over the history of their times. The second is that we ourselves, by lengthy examination of materials presenting a partial and one-sided view of the question, may be influenced unduly by the opinions expressed by our authorities.

With these words I must bring my last lecture to a close. I have tried to show you briefly an example of the application

¹ Cf. the remarks of Abu'l Fazl in his Introduction to the *Ayeeen Akberi*, ed. cil., p. ix.

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of critical methods to some of the solutions which have been propounded for a particular problem of history. My examination of the historical significance of the personal equation has at least revealed the necessity of scrutinising with the most meticulous care the nature of the materials upon which we have to work. Not content with discovering and allowing for the bias in our author which springs from his personal predilections, or which is induced by some particular characteristic of the period which he studies; we must in addition strive to eliminate that much more elusive thing, the bias which, all unconsciously so far as he is concerned, creeps into his work through the influence of the very atmosphere—social, political or religious—amidst which his work was carried on.

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